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# Asian American perspectives on college student experience: An interpretive narrative

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ASIAN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES ON COLLEGE STUDENT EXPERIENCE:

AN INTERPRETIVE NARRATIVE

BY

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DISSERTATION

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire

In Partial Fulfillment of

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in

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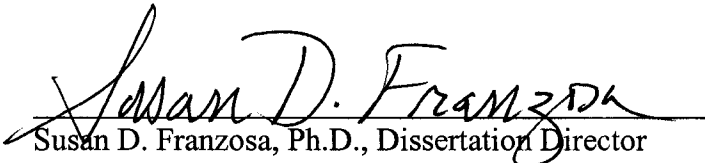
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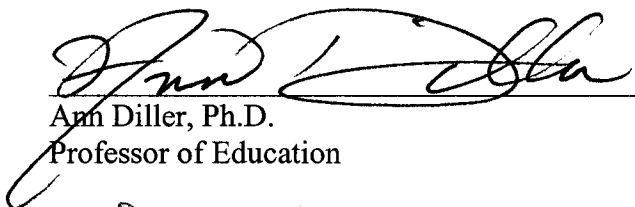
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This dissertation has been examined and approved.

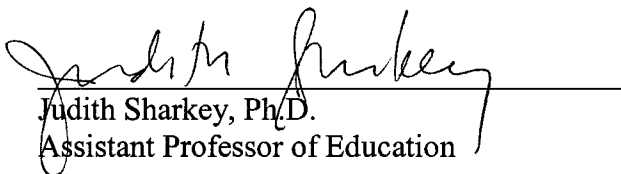
  
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To the Chens, Einsiedlers, and especially my children: Two graduated from college during this project. The other one, now about to enter college, can barely remember his primary school days when I first began graduate school...

Finally, to my husband: This project would not have been completed without your immeasurable support. Often, Chas would come home to find a chapter to read instead having supper prepared.

*"Everyone leaves home and everyone finds a place to call home. Exodus, it turns out, is genesis"* (Pearlman, 1996, p. 6). This completes the final stage of a long journey with a word that means both hello and goodbye, taken from a place where Asian Americans now live as a majority.

*Aloha and mehala* (thank you).

## PROLOGUE

*A weaver constructs tapestries on cloth with fibers and threads: horizontal alternating between vertical rows of warp. Before the work of weaving can begin, warp is selected to prepare the foundational layer. The yarn must be strong enough to endure the passage through time for the next generation, but yet must reflect the colors and textures from a vision of beauty. The warp is painstakingly arranged in vertical rows, tightly wound on the frame of the loom. Only when the warping is completed can the work of weaving begin in earnest.*

*She calls up a vision and begins to fill the frame with weft. Yarn moves between her fingers as completed rows are signaled by the rhythmic sounds of the wooden loom. Each row is tapped securely in place. Slowly, the weft begins to fill the cloth with that vision using variations in fiber, texture, and color. Eventually a pattern becomes visible. It is her favorite weaving pattern, originally taken from a Scottish tartan plaid. . . .*

## PERSONAL COMMENTARY

*"What does it mean to be an Asian American college student?"*

This is the primary question of this study. It was conceived from questions from my personal experiences, but guided by my academic perspectives. The genesis of this project came from observations made of my children's college experiences during the nineties. Two of my three children, a daughter and son, graduated from East and West Coast liberal arts colleges. Their college experiences were completely different, even opposite in many respects. The details are reserved for another discussion, but the point is that as multi-racial college students, they were forced to confront issues of Asian American identity upon entering college.

These college experiences of my children could have been coincidental. But to me, they seemed somehow reflective of American's history of social movements that impacted significant organizational and cultural changes in the colleges across the country. It also made me wonder whether I, as a second-generation Chinese American, should have been more aware of these issues and, as their parent, introduced discussions into the home before my children left for college. This began my own thoughts, remembering what life had been like for me as a Chinese American girl in the sixties.

Before this doctoral experience, my perspective had been shaped by the world of empirical science and the invisible world of microbes. I studied microbiology as an undergraduate major and Master's student. To this day, I continue to be fascinated with advances in this discipline, emerging disease epidemics and new implications from bio-terrorism.



I was fortunate to be hired to teach microbiology to college students almost two decades ago. Despite my extended experience with college as student and teacher, my children were telling me something new had happened in college life. There was something about higher education and being Asian American that I had somehow missed during my own experiences.

*"What was it like growing up as a Chinese American during the Sixties?"*

My parents came to the United States separately. They were both trained in China as physicians, but had to repeat their medical residencies as a requirement for medical licensure. Their residencies were originally in urban cosmopolitan areas. After they met and when they married, my parents wanted to raise their children in a "nice place to live that was different from the city." I found out later that when they first arrived into this new town, my father had been told "there wasn't any room for another orthopedic doctor to practice in this town." This is where I grew up with my four sisters.

I consider myself a "true-blue Yankee" having lived my entire life here in New England. I grew up in a small town where life seemed simpler than the tightly scheduled lifestyle common in today's households. At the time, there were only two Chinese families in town, a third family moved in later during high school. These three families remained close friends after I left home for college. There were very few visits with my family relatives. They were limited to visits from my mother's family.

I grew up in a multilingual household where English and two dialects of Chinese were spoken. I first learned to speak in Cantonese. I remember translating English to Chinese to speak to my grandmother during her rare visits from Hong Kong. At home, both parents conversed with each other in Cantonese but spoke to us only in English.

When I entered kindergarten, I stopped speaking Cantonese. I don't really remember much else about that year except some vague concerns voiced about my ability to talk in class. Now, I can understand the gist of Cantonese conversations in Chinatown and I seem pretty comfortable expressing myself in the classroom.

*"DON'T tell anyone you're Chinese but make sure people know that you are NOT Japanese."*

This advice came from my father. This didn't make sense to me until I thought about my parents' past and how they arrived in the United States. Both had left China during the post-war regime change in the late 1940s. They didn't talk much about growing up in Mainland China. Their few stories described witnessing brutal Japanese attacks during the takeover invasion into China and families torn apart by mixed political allegiances. My parents had to destroy their permanent birth records or face imprisonment with other educated professionals. Shortly after leaving China, my father received a letter from his mother who was still in Mainland China. It informed him that the Communist government and family members in China had forced her to disown him as her son.

Although I grew up in a household where Chinese was spoken and many Chinese customs were observed, I felt no connection with China. How did my father's feelings about his Chinese ethnicity impact the messages he gave to his own children? His spoken and unspoken messages seemed to reflect fears and experiences stemming from these extraordinary circumstances during a life in China. *Or does it?*

I was born during the era of McCarthyism, when communist activities were considered subversive anti-government behaviors and sufficient justification for incarceration. At that time, even unsubstantiated accusations could result in personal

financial ruin. With his death, the true nature of my father's advice will remain a conundrum. Nevertheless, his simple words can illustrate how perspective differences may affect understandings of ethnic identity.

*"Congratulations. You have been accepted for Doctoral Study in the Department of Education...."*

This began a new personal journey that differed from any other academic experience I have ever encountered in my microbiology classes. The coursework of this program essentially provided the liberal arts training that I had somehow missed during college. Understanding human dimensions of teacher-learner dynamics began to provide explanations through variable student perspectives observed in the science classroom over time. Social implications were found in education philosophy, curriculum theory, epistemology, and even education law. Understanding the nature of human experience seemed completely logical to improving teaching-learning dynamics despite the empirical nature of science itself. My longstanding interest in social group behavior and identity was piqued, whether through questions of science classroom, gender, social frameworks of knowledge, questions of "truth," educational research, affirmative action, and, yes, Asian American identity.

*"I was very happy as a white blob until this PhD Asian American thing came along. You grabbed me and ripped me out of my happiness."*

Enter my third and last child. First, it is important to realize that this last child is very astute but he can also be prone to exaggeration. Unlike the first two, he has been here at home to witness this academic journey. He is currently working on a high school project about Asian American immigration and comparisons between the Angel and Ellis

Island experiences. However, this question still remains: How will his Asian American college student experience in a different millennium compare to that of his siblings?

These comments reveal the personal perspective of this researcher-interpreter through multiple viewpoints that offer alternative explanations, often paradoxical but plausible, when considered through individual perspective and relevant cultural communities.

These personal comments also describe a researcher-interpreter perspective grounded by both objective and subjective viewpoints. This prologue also describes growing up in a household of medical science, founded on academic and professional training in observations of physical detail and causal interpretations through biologic explanations. This doctoral experience was my introduction to a contemporary liberal arts core curriculum that serves as the conceptual foundations for this study. The coursework provided a social humanist perspective and psycho-social frameworks of knowledge formation.

This prologue reveals personal parallels to the college student experiences to be described in the following dissertation. These parallels are important to consider during the interpretive analysis of this research, and will be further addressed through methodological considerations. It is also necessary to remember the presence of both objective and subjective viewpoints in this researcher-interpreter's perspective. The personal narrative in this prologue introduces the possibility of multiple explanations to shared experiences of time, place, and space, revealed through further considerations of interpretation, perspective, and culture.

I am second-generation Chinese American who was born into Chinese family traditions. My Asian American perspective is shaped by an ethnic Chinese American perspective, living and learning in "Yankee" New England, an education that has provided multiple tools for professional work and foundations for academic scholarship, and an adult perspective based on marriage, motherhood, and professional-academic experiences.

The selected sound bites of girlhood, motherhood, and college were provided to reveal aspects of researcher perspective important to the research integrity of this project. Considerations from these comments should be kept in mind in the following dissertation, a narrative interpretation in response to the primary question:

*"What was it like to be an Asian American student at Oxford Hills College?"*

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## ABSTRACT

### ASIAN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES ON COLLEGE STUDENT EXPERIENCE: AN INTERPRETIVE NARRATIVE:

by

Linda Chen Einsiedler

University of New Hampshire, September, 2004

This is a socio-cultural study examining contemporary Asian American college student experiences at a private liberal arts residential college in the rural Northeast United States. This project utilizes a grounded theory approach designed to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. The findings include a narrative interpretation that considers emotional experiences and social behaviors as sub-consciously held internalized identity beliefs.

This project details psychological and social dimensions of shared Asian American experiences with insights into individual interpretive perspective frameworks shaped by community cultures. This study describes a distinctive Asian American identity that conjoins ethnicity with racial self-identity. Variables in ethnic identity, linguistic capability, immigration background, and racial identity are specifically investigated for impact on Asian American identity formation. Intra-group differences between Asian Americans are described through socio-cultural linguistic schisms, academic disconnects, and ethno-racial conflicts present during family and college existences. Implications in Asian American identity formation and multicultural approaches affecting curriculum and student life issues are suggested by these findings.



## INTRODUCTION

### BEGINNING THE CONVERSATION

#### Asian American *Han*

*Han* is a Korean word meaning one, single, the same. It can be used to describe the unity of minds, as in han-mah-eum, but can also be used to describe multiple feelings of frustration, sorrow, and insatiable desires. (Korean American Campus Performance, 2000)

This study examines contemporary Asian American student experiences specific to “Oxford Hills College,” a pseudonym for a selective private liberal arts college located in the rural Northeast United States. The purpose of this student community study is two-fold. First, this inquiry seeks shared psycho-social experiences described by Asian American discourses and individual student narratives to suggest a collective *han* perspective.<sup>1</sup> Second, this study examines the influence of multiple community cultures on college student perspective transformation and Asian American self-identity.

This study is premised on a holistic conceptual approach examining interconnections between multiple perspectives within a given community. This project uses multiple interdisciplinary research methods to explore inter-relationships among self-identity, social interaction, perspective location, and community culture. Past recollections are interpreted for commonalities in past experiences affecting individual perspective formation and social interactions during campus life at Oxford Hills.

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<sup>1</sup> In this discussion, discourse was originally described by Bruner (1996). The student community discourses appeared primarily through campus-wide interchanges of indirect dialectic responses to various topics of interest expressed by the community.

As a cultural study in higher education, this research is specific to a distinctive campus culture defined by “*living and learning*“ within a single “*residential academic community*.” This study seeks to explain the social formation of Asian American *han* through a two-pronged research strategy designed examine Asian American student experiences and campus culture of Oxford Hills College. The Asian American student organizations provided opportunities to collect the student research data which described community discourses and individual narratives of experience.

### Asian American Identity Perspectives and Community Discourse

Student perspectives were based on student voices from the community discourse of shared Asian American experiences and individual accounts which described college life at Oxford Hills. In this sense, *perspective* is based on individual meanings of past experience which have become integrated into a cognitive framework used to interpret the reality of human existence. Thus, experience appears based on perceived meanings which may vary according to the actual circumstances and individual perspective.<sup>2</sup> Broadly speaking, *discourse* refers to “debated talk which included personal narratives, organized around consequential events as a primary way individuals make sense of their experiences” (Reissman, 1993, p. 4).

This study describes psycho-social perspectives of Asian American identity based on definitions of ethnicity and racial identity. *Ethnicity* describes identity based on geographic definitions specific to Asian cultures located on the far shores of the Pacific. In contrast, *racial* identity describes a group category based on physical similarities

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<sup>2</sup> According to Habermas (1987), perspective involves “self-understanding” of individuals relative to the extant community. This historical-hermeneutic approach describes knowledge understood through interpretations of individual experience and perspective-situatedness.

attached to social perceptions. Perspectives of Asian American self-identity are explained through complex interrelationships between cognitive interpretive frameworks and perspectives formed during socialization. The purpose of this project is to study *racial formation* as a social process. In this sense, “*racial*” is distinguished from the descriptive term, *racist*, used to describe “essentialist categories of race creating or reproducing structures of domination” (Omi & Winant, 1994).

The total student population at Oxford Hills ranged between two to five thousand students, equally distributed according to gender (See Appendix F: Demographic Description of the Students at Oxford Hills). Broadly speaking, the sample size in this study approximated ten percent of the total Asian American student population reported at Oxford Hills.<sup>3</sup> This study represents a pan-ethnic student perspective with ancestral origins from East and South Asian cultures. These Asian American perspectives also describe immigratino experiences representing first- to fourth-generations with an emphasis from voices of 1.5- and second-generation students.

A majority of students originated from mono-ethnic Asian and mono-racial family households (Kuh & Whitt, 1994, p. 71). Predominant voices described ancestral origins from East Asia. The largest ethnic population on campus appeared comprised of Korean American students. To a lesser extent, clusters representing Chinese and Japanese cultures were also found in this sample population. Student voices describing multi-

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<sup>3</sup> Because the college demographic data is not reported disaggregated by Asian ethnicity, the figures representing the Asian American student community were extrapolated from specific information reported by campus officials, college committees, student organizations, or newspaper descriptions. See Appendix F: Demographic Description of the Oxford Hills Students.

racial and multiple ethnic family backgrounds were also included in the conversations of Asian American student experiences to follow.<sup>4</sup>

Distinct ethnic perspectives are described with significant differences reflecting family immigration and language capabilities. *First generation* Asian Americans emigrated from native Asian countries and were found associated with *Ethnic-Diasporic* identities expressed through native Asian traditions. In contrast, *1.5 generation* describes Asian Americans who immigrated often during childhood and noted by educational experiences within American schools. *Second-generation* individuals represented acculturated Asian Americans who were born and raised in the United States. A majority voice emphasizing 1.5- and second-generation immigrant histories represented an emergent *Ethnic American-born* perspective. These students appeared defined by experiences in American Hometowns yet remained influenced by their ethnic Asian Homeland cultures through the family experiences of Home.<sup>5</sup> Ethnic perspectives primarily represented South and East Asian regions with immigration experiences from first- to fourth-generations.<sup>6</sup>

Student voices from the community discourse described a heterogeneous Asian American community with complexities in ethnic, academic, and racial perspectives and commonalities associated with American Hometown, immigration history, language, and family life experiences. Shared meanings of self-identity and socio-cultural differences

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<sup>4</sup> The students appeared equally distributed according to gender, academic, and co-curricular interests. The student sample represented multiple ethnic-Asian ancestries, different ethnic Asian linguistic capabilities, mixed ethnic and racial family backgrounds.

<sup>5</sup> This study encompassed first to fourth-generation perspectives. The survey responses also suggested student clusters from New York and California.

<sup>6</sup> Predominant student viewpoints represented East Asian ethnic origins and 1.5/second generation immigration backgrounds.

suggest a distinctive Asian American *han* with identities shaped through the lenses of ethnic and racial identity perspectives.

### Description of the College

The description of the College is based on a separate investigation also included as part of this study. The institutional data included archived resources such as College Charter, historical descriptions of campus life, official College publications, and reports available through various print media. The institutional research was comprised of historical and contemporaneous data which described aspects of college life that could suggest a college culture. The voices of campus representatives are used to articulate a description of Oxford Hills that also portrays an institutional perspective that reflects the college culture.

Oxford Hills College was founded as a Christian missionary during the late 1700s with liberal arts traditions with liberal arts traditions traced to British origins. Its Charter Mission described a dedication to the education of British and indigenous American youth in learning “reading, writing, and all parts of the liberal Arts and Sciences.”<sup>7</sup>

[Oxford Hills] is a *residential academic community*—in effect, a modern-day version of what Thomas Jefferson once described as an “academical village.” The residential and social component of a [Oxford Hills] education is as important as what happens in the classroom. It must simultaneously foster the values of an inclusive community even as it supports and enhances the central academic mission of the College. (Emphasis added; Committee Report, 2000).

The institutional research described Oxford Hills as a highly selective college with rigorous admissions standards and competitive selection process. Campus life appeared

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<sup>7</sup>The original Oxford Hills College Charter was written in the early 1900s.

distinctive for an experiential undergraduate experience that combined the traditions of liberal arts, classroom teaching excellence, and “living and learning” residential life. “Living and learning” within this “residential academic community” represented a campus culture united in common academic mission and liberal arts philosophy. College documents asserted the distinctive nature of this campus community with references to “*The Oxford Hills Experience.*”

Just as learning to learn is a lifetime goal of the liberal arts, so is learning how to learn with and from those who are different from you. (Oxford Hills College President, Convocation Speech, 2002)

You also enter a classroom without boundaries, a course of study not circumscribed by time limits, a learning environment that is as much about people as about place. With few exceptions, never before and likely never again will you live and work in such a small, intimate twenty-four-hours-a-day community, with so many people so different from you. (Oxford Hills College President, Convocation Speech, 2001)

#### Overview of the Study

This study seeks to explain shared experiences through multiple considerations of self-identity and perspectives based on community cultural values (Kuh & Whitt, 1988, p. 13). The conceptual foundations are based on social interactions theory and Mead Model of Self (Mead, 1934; 1956). Grounded theory is based on an inductive approach with new knowledge emergent *a posteriori* from the data collection, in contrast to deductive methods that prove existing theories.<sup>8</sup> This study used multidisciplinary methods of data collection strategies and convergent interpretation-analysis processes. Quantitative and qualitative student data were interpreted for themes relating to Asian American *han* and perspectives on self-identity. The institutional research included historical and contemporaneous descriptions of Oxford Hills College to suggest an institutional

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<sup>8</sup> (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

perspective and contextual setting for significant campus events described by the students.

Although both quantitative and qualitative research approaches were used, the findings were primarily based on qualitative data. The findings were based on a narrative thematic of past-present-future to suggest multiple interpretations of common experiences according to individual perspective and community culture.<sup>9</sup> Multiple data collection methods revealed psychological and social dimensions of common campus experiences at Oxford Hills College.

In this study, *community discourse* is used to represent student data from surveys, interviews, campus presentations, group discussions and newspaper publications. These resources were invaluable in identifying various dialectic conversational threads that eventually became themes of past family and present-day college experiences. The data from the community discourse is presented in Chapters 3 and 4. These chapters describe the repeated questions from similarities of Youth and College experiences interpreted through *past-present* meanings.

The individual student narratives in Chapter 5 are distinguished from the community discourse voices in the previous chapters. These students interpreted college experience by adding future meaning considerations with apparent resolution provided by a *past-present-future* thematic.

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<sup>9</sup>In this sense, perspective is based on individual meanings of past experience which have become integrated into a cognitive framework used to interpret the reality of human existence. Thus, experience appears based on perceived meanings which may vary according to the actual circumstances and individual perspective.

## Narrative Inquiry

This study used different applications of narrative as a data form, interpretive framework, and style of expository writing. As a data form, autobiographical descriptions were provided through individual student essays. These narratives were retrospective descriptions of personal experience accompanied by interpretation through a coherent theme.<sup>11</sup> In comparison to other data forms, narrative essays were particularly significant towards furthering insights through added personal details and emotional descriptions. Research analysis was based on past-present-future meanings interpreted from the student data.

The narrative thematic provided a coherent framework for analysis with revealed themes represented as *narrative texts* (Polkinghorn, 1980). Recollections of Youth described socio-cultural themes from past Home, Hometown, Homeland, and School experiences. *Home* is specific to family life in American hometown communities. *Hometown* specifically describes social experiences distinguished from family and school communities. A theme associated with homogeneous White Hometown cultural experiences emerged during this study.

In contrast, Homeland refers to the ethnic Asian country of ancestry expressed through differences depending on immigration history. *Diaspora is used to describe* migrating populations with cultural roots to ethnic Asian regions. As ethnocentric perspectives, both Diasporic and American-born represent perspectives situated in Asian cultures and based on geographic definitions. Emergent from this study were two



distinctly different perspectives, ethnic Diasporic and ethnic American-born (Takaki, 1989).<sup>10</sup>

Finally, this dissertation was written in narrative style to tell the story of these students explained through psycho-social dimensions of Asian American college experience to suggest implications of a *han* perspective encompassing ethnic, racial, and academic experiences as their Oxford Hills experiences.

### Research Integrity

Because of the subjective nature inherent in social science research, methodological considerations were necessary to maintain the research integrity of this project. Interpretation trustworthiness was addressed through methodological strategies that used triangulating verification and perspective variation.<sup>11</sup> In accordance with confidentiality considerations, specific descriptive information has been re-identified with all names appearing as pseudonyms within this text.

The discussion of researcher interpreter is a necessary consideration during the final analysis of this project. Details of relevant family, academic, and professional experiences are provided in the Prologue to provide a perspective representation relevant to this discussion. This narrative suggests a researcher-interpreter perspective as a second-generation Chinese American with lenses as a mother, wife, Chinese daughter, student, college educator, and microbiologist/social scientist. The personal experiences from the Prologue suggest commonalities with the student experiences to follow. These

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<sup>10</sup> *Diaspora* was a frequently used term in descriptions of Asian American immigration history. (Takaki, 1989)

<sup>11</sup> Perspective approaches varied according to ethnic/racial and etic/emic viewpoints. The multiple methods of data collection facilitated comparisons of personal accounts which appeared to differ according to cultural perspective, time/space/place circumstances, and empirical/interpretive descriptions of experience.

considerations will need to be kept in mind throughout the following research discussion and narrative interpretation that seeks to answer the question, “*What is it like to be an Asian American student in college?*”

The personal commentary also introduces critical inquiry as a fundamental approach used throughout this dissertation narrative. Critical narrative inquiry suggests the existence of multiple plausible explanations of any given experience based on interpretation, perspective, and culture. While the research methodology included both quantitative and qualitative approaches, the final analysis emphasized the latter through interpretive narrative frameworks.

*Chapter 1* describes the research rationale of this guided study through an interwoven discussion of *theoria* and *praxis*. *Theoria* from the tradition of social interactionism provides the conceptual foundations of socio-cultural identify formation. As the pragmatic application of theoretical concepts, *praxis* is represented through a narrative describing research design, methodological considerations, and interpretive analytic frameworks.

*Bricolage* has been used to describe qualitative inquiry as an “emergent construction that changes and takes new forms as different tools, methods, and techniques.”<sup>12</sup> *Chapter 2* provides a *bricolage* description of Oxford Hills campus life through a composite description of campus community perspectives emergent from the institutional research. This Chapter establishes the contextual setting for the student experiences to follow.

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<sup>12</sup> In qualitative research, the researcher-interpreter has been described as *bricoleur* or “jack of all trades.”

The next two Chapters introduce voices from the student community discourse through past-present narratives to reveal the socio-cultural themes of Asian American identity formation. Each chapter describes psychological, social, and emotional dimensions of student experience with suggested implications of Asian American self-identity viewed through ethnic, academic, and racial perspectives.

*Chapter 3* is specific to past Home, Hometown, Homeland and School experiences occurring prior to the Oxford Hills College years. This Chapter introduces past recollections to describe formative social experiences which influenced shared perspectives of Asian American self-identity existing before college entry. This Chapter describes childhood recollections of Hometowns which locate these student perspectives as part of an American Experience. In particular, ethnocentric differences between American-born and Asian-Diasporic perspectives reveal socio-cultural interconnections between immigration histories and linguistic applications.

*Chapter 4* continues this conversation through past-present revelations specific to ethnic, academic and racial experiences from the student community discourse. These narratives texts provide an understanding of shared experiences which describe college transitions influencing campus entry, academic, and racial identity experiences. This chapter is interwoven by the fictional voices from *Dear Mom and Dad* and *I See Your Face*, original creative prose written by students from this campus community.

*Chapter 5* contains individual narratives based on student essays which articulated past-present-future meanings of college experience. These narratives added a future dimension to the existing interpretive framework. The voices of Gavin, Sarah, Kim,

Bruce , and Erik describe life lessons during their college years attached to profound self-discoveryt and hua-shent perspective transformation.

Finally, *Chapter 6* concludes this conversation. The findings summarize an Asian American *han* influencing perspective transformations through shared academic, ethnic, and racial college experiences and research implications suggesting future research possibilities in higher education.

Together, these Chapters provide an interpretive analysis of Asian American *han* and perspective of college experience that transcends conventional ethnic boundaries and suggests psycho-social significance through ethnic, academic, and racial lenses. This metaphorical conversation of Asian American college student experience continues in the next Chapter with the research rationale and conceptual foundations of this project through the voices of social philosophers and education theorists.

## CHAPTER 1

### RESEARCH RATIONALE

#### Introduction

The research rationale is a guided discussion of a journey beginning from the furthest perspective at the conceptual level of *theoria*, moving closer through the discussion of research *praxis*, the pragmatic considerations and changing strategies made during the course of pre-planning, implementation, and analysis.

The conceptual foundations are based on social interactionism theory explained through the Mead Model of Self. Core identity concepts explained through individual perspectives which appear as interpretations based on social interactions and community culture. The Mead model provides an explanation of socio-cultural identity formation based on Self, a fluid identity interpreted from a cognitive framework from personal meanings of past social experience. This model seeks to explain a psycho-social cultural process of identity formation through concepts of I, Me selfhoods, perspective, and consciousness.<sup>13</sup>

The research design was originally based on the naturalistic model of inquiry and grounded theory approach that utilized multidisciplinary data collection methodologies. *Theoria* and research *praxis* are interwoven in this grounded theory discussion that describes multi-disciplinary data collection forms, emergent findings, interpretive

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<sup>13</sup> (Mead 1934)

frameworks, and discovery. Particular emphasis is placed on the role of narrative that became increasingly evident during the course of research discovery.

Secondary themes are also interwoven through this philosophical discussion. These threads include culturalist viewpoints in education theory and narrative models of knowledge construction (Bruner, 1996; Polkinghome, 1988). References are also made to Piaget's concepts of dis-equilibrium and dissonance in learning and Habermas's theory of critical hermeneutics explaining human experience through interpretation, linguistics, and perspective were also considered during the conceptualization stage of this project (Piaget, 1954; Habermas, 1987; Cole, 1995). Lastly, *pathos* is introduced to include the consideration of emotional experiences reflecting the totality of human existence through thought, action, and emotion.<sup>14</sup>

This rationale provides an interpretation of human experience as a totality of psychological, social, and emotional dimensions. Section One begins with a discussion of the current research regarding Asian Americans in higher education that led to the rationale. Section Two describes the study as *theoria* with *praxis*.

Separate preliminary literature reviews were conducted for analysis of campus life in higher education and scholarship in contemporary Asian American experiences. Reviews were also conducted for critical analyses and philosophic perspectives of contemporary higher education. Another literature search was conducted to examine existing scholarship on pan-ethnic Asian American identity and college student

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<sup>14</sup> According to rhetoric theory, *pathos* is a form of persuasion based on emotion. When used effectively, this method appeals to the "sympathies and emotions of the audience causing them to accept the ideas, propositions, or calls to action" (Covino, 1995, p. 17).

experience. These preliminary reviews delineated the parameters of research design through a suggested need for cultural studies in higher education.

Another review established the parameters for the research questions examining ethnic and racial identity experiences in a pan-ethnic Asian American student population. Existing body of research revealed a small number of studies specific to Asian American college student experiences. Most studies appeared limited either by ethnic sample populations or theoretical racial identity models. Preliminary reviews of existing scholarship on Asian American identity experiences showed a preponderance of identity studies that emphasized ethnicity with limited applicability to a collective pan-ethnic representation of identity.

Despite this limitation, this review revealed an increasing number of qualitative studies being done in Asian American research. The literature review of Asian American perspectives in identity research and college experience suggested a need for more critical research studies that examine pan-ethnic racial experiences and a group identity that accounts for racial and ethnic social formation.

A separate review was conducted to determine the nature of existing scholarship representing contemporary Asian American perspectives in higher education. This preliminary investigation revealed a small number of studies conducted on college campuses, with a preponderance appearing limited in application to pan-ethnic Asian American college student populations.

The review of studies done on Asian Americans in higher education established the parameters for the research questions and interpretive framework analyzing for ethnic and racial identity themes. Preliminary investigations suggested a need for Asian

American research specific to pan-ethnic racial identity models, college student experience, and cultural models of American higher education (Omi & Winant, 1994).

### Research of Asian Americans in Higher Education

The term, “Asian American,” originated as a political alliance during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. The Asian American Movement represented a social change that transcended existing ethnic boundaries to become a new pan-ethnically shared identity. This term is now used as a racial designation in the demographic data from various governmental and educational agencies.

The literature review began as an inquiry into identity formation since initial student activities were organized to discuss experiences relating to issues of Asian American identity. The purpose of the literature review was to examine the existing scholarship on Asian Americans in higher education, particularly with studies based on pan-ethnic Asian American sample populations.

The complexities of Asian Americans, defined by ethnic Asian immigrant history and racial designation, did not appear explained by the existing scholarship using stage developmental models based on identity typology. However, the literature review identified socio-cultural parameters for the research questions and provided guidance for methodological considerations of this cultural study based on a grounded theory approach.

### Demographic Data of Asian American College Students

According to the Census 2000 survey, Asian Americans comprise 3.6 percent of the country's total population. The influence of immigration history remains prominent in contemporary Asian American experience; represented by ethnic populations from at



least 25 different Asian countries.<sup>15</sup> Largest number of immigrants have been reported from mainland China, Philippines, India, Vietnam, Korea, and Japan.<sup>16</sup> Imminent enrollment increases on college campuses are forecasted from reports of large numbers of students concentrated between the ages of fifteen and nineteen.

The census data also included aggregated educational statistics of Asian Americans, reported as a single category.<sup>17</sup> Numerous reviews have examined this data with respect towards high school performance, college persistence and graduation rates, and graduate school enrollment rates (Hsia, 1998). The aggregated data portrayed Asian Americans as a minority group notable by academic success continuing through college.

Educational statistics also described larger percentages of Asian American students who enrolled in baccalaureate programs immediately after high school graduation. The American Council on Education reported the percentage of Asian American college students an estimated 6 percent on campuses nationwide with enrollment numbers having increased over 80 percent over a ten-year period (Wilds & Wilson, 2000). These numbers described Asian American students as having an increasing minority presence on campus and suggested possible ramifications of this study for a potentially large sector of future college students.

The national enrollment statistics described Asian American college students as a significant minority presence on today's campuses with comparative enrollment rates higher than numbers of other racial/ethnic minority students. Census 2000 reported

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<sup>15</sup> Census 2000 reported 3.6 percent of the United States population as "Asian only" and an additional 0.6 percent as multiracial Asian (U. S. Census Bureau, March 2000).

<sup>16</sup> These ethnic groups are listed in descending order according to population size (U. S. Census, 2000).

educational attainment statistics of Asian American students disproportionately higher with concentrated numbers having graduated with baccalaureate and advanced graduate degrees.<sup>18</sup>

Further examination of the education statistics began to suggest equivocal findings with respect to Asian American ethnic sub-populations. The Census 2000 educational attainment statistics reported a bimodal distribution with concentrated numbers at college *and* eighth grade levels.<sup>19</sup> In addition, fewer females were reported attending college in comparison with Asian American males with women appearing to graduate at a faster rate than their White counterpart populations.<sup>20</sup>

Quantitative studies of Asian American college students were less frequently reported. Some of these studies seem to contradict the image of minority success that appears commonly portrayed in contemporary American popular culture.<sup>21</sup> In a review of minority issues in higher education, Hune called for “a need to understand struggles and strategies of rapidly growing numbers of Asian Americans on college campuses” (Hune, 1993, p. 210).

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<sup>17</sup> Census 2000 included data on Asian Americans reported aggregated into the category “Asian and Pacific Islanders.”

<sup>18</sup> Census 2000 reports 85 percent of Asian Americans enrolling in college directly out of high school and 44 percent having a bachelor’s degree or higher.

<sup>19</sup> The survey data described the largest number of pre-colleges Asian Americans ages 15-19 year-olds comprising 8.6% of the total Asian American population. This number was higher than the percentage of similarly-aged White population at 6.8% (U. S. Census Bureau, March 2000).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> “Invidious effects from a Model Minority Myth” has been described by Suzuki as receiving much attention in Asian American research. Other scholars have examined the portrayal of Asian Americans through stereotyped images found in television and film media sources (Suzuki, 2002; Hamamoto, 1994; Bernstein & Studlar, 1997).

Comparisons between aggregated and disaggregated data of Asian American students and faculty revealed insights that were sometimes different, even contradictory. In a later study, Hune and Chan compared high school performance statistics reported according to aggregated racial and disaggregated Asian ethnic categories. The increasing college enrollment numbers were partially explained by the large numbers of high school students who enrolled in college preparatory courses. The same study also reported “uneven” high school achievement levels with decreasing numbers of recent Asian immigrants enrolled in college.<sup>22</sup>

The appearance of “minority success” is less conclusive when the demographic data of Asian Americans is disaggregated into sub-variables such as immigration history, ethnicity, and gender. Hune and Chan's comparative review of aggregated/disaggregated statistics reported “homogenization” from aggregated data that appears to conflate numbers of foreign- and American-educated Asians into a single category (Hune & Chan, 1997, p. 18). In comparing information using “Asian American” as an aggregated “umbrella category” with statistics disaggregated according to immigration history and socioeconomic levels, these authors described the absence of critical information that reported on significant inter-group differences (Hune & Chan, 1997, p. 19).

Although a general impression of burgeoning enrollments of Asian Americans at selective institutions has often been described as “impressive” in comparison with other minority groups, the national statistics describe even greater concentrations of Asian Americans attending two- and four-year programs at public institutions (Chang & Kiang,

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<sup>22</sup> The findings of Hune and Chan were based on a study originally done in 1990. When disaggregated by ethnicity, the findings reported college enrollment figures ranging from 65 percent Chinese and Japanese to 26.3 percent Loatian Americans (Hune & Chan, 1997).

2002, p. 144). Wilds reported 60 percent of Asian Americans were reported attending four-year institutions and 79 percent enrolled in public institutions (Wilds, 1998). In a subsequent analysis of the demographic data, Chang and Kiang (2002) describe significant numbers of Asian Americans “who are unprepared for college and need remedial work.”

Hsia and Hirano-Nakanishi compared enrollment statistics and academic performance data of Chinese, Vietnamese, Filipino, Asian Indian, Korean, and Japanese college students. These studies described marked differences between ethnic groups, results which appeared “invisible” when reported as a single aggregated statistical category. The comparative research suggested aggregated data of Asian Americans risked “homogenization” and revealed a need to collect both aggregated and disaggregated information regarding Asian American sub-group populations (Hsia & Hirano-Nakanishi, 1989; Hune, 2002).

The Asian American demographic data first appeared as racial statistical reports to describe college campus populations. The aggregated data provided information that seemed to validate this research project. Yet subsequent qualitative analyses suggested such data risked the homogenization of this distinctive population through a “tendency to marginalize or render invisible Asian American concerns.”<sup>23</sup>

Minority statistics also reported Asian American faculty comprising an estimated 3.5 percent of the total American professoriate (Astin, Antonio, Cress, & Astin, 1997). These figures seemed surprisingly low in comparison with demographic profiles of the

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<sup>23</sup> “There is a tendency to marginalize or render invisible Asian American concerns and to rely on Black/White frameworks that focus on parity as a primary goal” (Cho, 1996, as quoted in Chang & Kiang, 2002, p. 148).

college student population documented by massive increases for two decades. National educational attainment statistics reported largest numbers of Asian American students graduating with doctoral degrees in physical sciences and single-digit numbers found in education and social sciences.<sup>24</sup> Other reports described tenure difficulties also suggesting “glass ceiling” issues affecting Asian American faculty.<sup>25</sup>

Issues concerning the support for Asian American faculty and curriculum studies programs also appeared as themes in the student community discourse. While the research on Asian American faculty remained outside the purview of this study, the existing scholarship did provide an explanation for the low faculty numbers found at Oxford Hills as well for the overall scarcity of Asian American research studies in higher education (Tanaka, Ebreo, Linn, & Morera, 1998).

The demographic data described Asian American college students as a significant, rapidly increasing minority presence on campuses nationwide.<sup>26</sup> The existing literature in higher education research suggested a need for disaggregated data in studying Asian American college students. This early information also seemed to validate the purpose of this research project by potentially yielding insight on a heterogeneous campus

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<sup>24</sup> The Astin study reported 79% of Asian American faculty possessing doctorate degrees. This report was based on 1995-96 survey data collected through the Cooperative Institutional Survey Program (CIRP) and the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI). The percentage of minority faculty in the total American professoriate was reported as less than nine percent. Astin reported 54% Asian American faculty taught in Physical and Life Sciences, 8% in Social Science, 11% Humanities, 10% Business, 2% Fine Arts, and 2% Education (Astin, et al., 1997, pp. 8, 33).

<sup>25</sup> Asian American faculty reported “higher levels of stress over the tenure/promotion process than do most other groups.” Escueta and O’Brien had reported low tenure rates of Asian American faculty, which seemed to be echoed by the facts of Minami’s highly publicized tenure experience at UCLA (Escueta & O’Brien, 1991; Minami, 1995; Chang & Kiang, 2002, p. 139).

<sup>26</sup> The largest numbers of pre-college Asian Americans appeared as ages 15-19 comprising 8.6% of the total Asian American population. This is larger than the percentage of similarly-aged White population at 6.8%. (U.S. Census 2000; McKinnon & Greico, 2001)

population that was rapidly changing. The student demographic profiles suggested significant inter-group differences appearing through variables such as ethnicity, immigration history, and socio-economic levels. This research on demographic profiles identified a clear need for disaggregated data in the proposed study of Asian American college student experiences.

Because disaggregated information of the Asian American students was not readily available from campus resources, the need to obtain such data became a primary focus of the research design.

#### College Admissions and Enrollment Issues

During the 1920s, the first wave of American-born Asian Americans appeared on West Coast university campuses that had been mainly populated by foreign Asian students. Later, East Coast campuses were reported mainly comprised of descendants from early Chinese and Japanese immigrants. The 1960s brought increasing numbers of high school students reported enrolling in “elite East Coast universities” and “expensive Ivy League Colleges.”<sup>27</sup>

The rapid rise of Asian American college student enrollment also generated increased momentum for the Asian American Movement that originated on the nation's college campuses. However, rising numbers of Asian American college applicants did not appear commensurate with the steady enrollment patterns at selective institutions. These facts generated close scrutiny from Asian American research scholars that triggered highly publicized comprehensive investigations by government and legal agencies (Wang, 1998; Nakanishi, 1993; Lucas, 1996).

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<sup>27</sup> Chan provides a historical account of Asian American demographic changes on American college campuses (Chan, 1991).

The implications of diversity and affirmative action initiatives on Asian American college students has received increasing amounts of attention in legal and education scholarship. Legal analyses have reported ambiguities in the status of Asian Americans reflected by judicial case law and Supreme Court rulings (Ancheta, 1998; Chang, 1993; Wu, 1995). Higher education scholars have also described Asian Americans appearing as “near Black” and “near White” depending on policy and situational circumstances in higher educational settings (Einsiedler & DeMitchell, 1999; Okihiro, 1994). Despite documented evidence of racial discrimination, other reports also suggest that Asian Americans rarely fall within the purview of race-based ameliorative strategies such as affirmative action (Ancheta, 1998; Einsiedler & DeMitchell, 1999, Okihiro, 1994). Scholars reporting on anti-discrimination legislation have suggested that existing racial jurisprudence often fails to account for differences in immigrant history and socioeconomic status.

Even in this last phase of manuscript preparation, this field is still remains in a constant state of flux. A recent decision issued by the United States Supreme Court has sharply restricted, yet stopped short of prohibiting the use of affirmative action policies in undergraduate admissions selection procedures.

This review would not have been complete without mention of the research regarding issues of selective admissions and affirmative action. While still remaining a significant concern, considerations of student access did not appear to be immediately relevant to the scope of this project that emphasized campus experiences occurring after the admissions process.

## Ethnic Identity

The discussion of Asian American identity must include the consideration of ethnicity, which continues to predominate contemporary cultural perspectives. The term, “ethnic,” has been used with different connotations (LaBelle, 1996, p. 29, #506). This study uses *ethnicity* in reference to shared cultural traditions and practices originating from Asian regions of ancestral origin. Ethnic culture encompasses different languages, calendar celebrations, political ideals, and religious beliefs.

Since the massive Asian immigration movement of the 1980s, the population of Asian Americans has increased by 108%.<sup>28</sup> Of this population, the U.S. Census population survey reported the existence of at least 24 different Asian ethnic groups; of which 44% are foreign born naturalized citizens.<sup>29</sup> Particularly through the influence of recent Asian American immigration perspectives, ethnicity continues to retain a primary role in contemporary Asian American experiences.

Since the student community discourse appeared centered around questions of identity, a review of existing ethnic and racial identity studies conducted with Asian American college students seemed a logical starting point. This effort yielded surprisingly few studies that appeared immediately relevant to the research questions, but was valuable in establishing the specific parameters of this psycho-social cultural study.

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<sup>28</sup> (Ong, 1994, p. 84).

<sup>29</sup> This was based on the 1997 U. S. population survey that was described in the Census Brief 2000 (U. S. Census Bureau, 2000).



The research in Asian American psycho-social identity appeared to emphasize ethnicity based on typology models and acculturation experience.<sup>30</sup> Ethnic identity has been extensively reported with far greater details compared with existing studies found pertaining to racial experiences of Asian Americans. Most of this research has been conducted in secondary school settings with some pan-ethnic student populations studied in college (Lee, 1996, p. 118).

Similarly, the research on Asian American college students also concentrated on identity development based on fixed identity stages and linear progression (Sue, 1998; Kitano, 1998). The research using identity typology were based on Erickson's Adolescent Theory, Tinto's Model of College Student Development, and Marcia's Theory of Racial Identity (Margula, Padilla & Pavel, 1991; Chew & Ogi, 1987; Ortiz, 1997, Chuang, 1998). These studies could not account for the heterogeneity of the Oxford Hills Students, which encompassed *both ethnic and pan-ethnic* experiences. In fact, some studies acknowledged the difficulty of reconciling multiple cultures found in Asian Americans as a "racial and ethnic impasse" (Tanaka, 1996).

Despite these limitations, the existing research did suggest a need to consider cognition through individual behaviors, social interactions, and social factors in the extant community. Instead, the voices of this study seemed to describe ethnic and racial identity formation as a spiraling process between self-identity, reflection, and self-discoveries that could be explained through Social Interactionism, the Mead Model of Self, and Omi and Winant Theory of Racial Formation (Mead, 1934).

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<sup>30</sup> Refer to Sue and Mak (1998) for a comprehensive review of psycho-social research on ethnic identity of Asian Americans.

## Pan-Ethnic Identity

The term “Asian American” originated as a pan-ethnic political movement and was used in the demographic reports as a racial designation. It seemed logical to examine the research conducted on pan-ethnic populations. However in this regard, there were few studies that used pan-ethnic sampling methods and examined specifically for racial experiences of Asian Americans college students.

The majority of Asian American identity studies emphasized ethnic identity in high school student population (Lee, 1996, p. 118). However, there were some pan-ethnic studies that were conducted at secondary and post-secondary educational levels. In a high school ethnographic study, Lee found that Asian American identity was affected by perceptions of the model minority stereotype and varied by both ethnic and pan-ethnic orientation. Korean-identified and “new-wave” identified students were more resistant to pan-ethnic identification. The impact of the surrounding Korean ethnic community also appeared to reinforce ethnic over pan-ethnic values.

Tanaka *et al* introduced a research paradigm that considered social parameters in cognitive processes to explain Asian American identity formation. This researcher described individual identity as a “mutable entity with changes occurring according to the social context” alluding to a dynamic interaction between evolving Asian American identities, social interactions, and community cultures (Tanaka, 1998, p. 32). In contrast to identity typology models, Tanaka's model appeared as a fluid entity that could account for the myriad of sub-cultures found reported as contemporary Asian America.

In a high school study, Lee reported that perceptions of “model minority” were influenced by immigration history and ethnic culture. “New-wave” students from Korean

ethnic communities preferred to self-identify by ethnicity. Other students from predominantly White homogeneous communities were described as “racialized ethnics” appearing to have negative internalized images of other Asians (Lee, 1996, pp. 106, 152). Although this study was based on ethnic-specific high school populations, parallels between the students in the Lee study and Oxford Hill community led to the consideration of Home and Hometown backgrounds in the final research design.

In a cross-cultural comparison of Asian American, African American, and Hispanic American college students, Ortiz found that language was a measure of ethnic identity and that the parents and family mediated and conveyed the culture to subsequent generations of Asian Americans. Similar to Hispanic Americans, Asian American students experienced strong ties to their culture when young, experienced a decline in the importance of ethnic identity during adolescence, and worked to regain their ethnicity in college. This study established the important role of pre-college experiences in learning about ethnic identity (Ortiz, 1997).

Another ethnic identity study examined the influence of acculturation on the psychological well-being of Asian American college students. Tsoi-Pullar reported a positive influence of “a strong sense of ethnic identity” and high acculturation levels on psychological well-being in Chinese-American students (Tsoi-Pullar, 1994). This study was significant in suggesting the influence of ethnicity and cultural transitions with significant impact on the mental health of Asian Americans.

Some studies suggested an evolution of ethnic definitions rooted in native Asian ancestry to a symbolic identity representing a distinctive American culture. Wang described *gensheng yemao*, used by Chinese Americans to describe a “new culture and

life grounded in the concrete and collective experiences in the United States” (Wang, 1998, p. 48). In a study done by Park, *jaemi kyopo* was a term used in describing American-born Koreans which exemplified an ethnic identity based on a situational definition. Park's study challenged the notion of ethnic identity defined only through Asian heritage, instead suggesting a new role of the university in shaping an “ethnic sense of self” in Asian American college students (Park, 2001, p. 218).

There were some studies found that examined ethnicity using pan-ethnic college student populations (Ortiz, 1997, p. 141). Margula *et al* reported the positive influence of student ethnic identity on social life and academic performance with suggested ramifications in student affairs (Margula et al., 1991). In another study, Uba (1994) examined a pan-ethnic population, reporting the significance of ethnic identity through differences in cultural behaviors and ethnic language fluency (Uba, 1994). The schemata of these studies suggested a nexus between ethnic cultural practices and pan-ethnic Asian American populations. Aspects of this research were used to guide the theoretical framework and pan-ethnic approaches used in this study.

A seminal study by Chew and Ogi reviewed issues described by Asian American college students. This publication appeared as one of the first articles focusing on Asian Americans as a unique student population and described campus life affected by intergenerational relationships, filial obligation, and college community organization (Chew & Ogi, 1987). This study is still frequently cited in student affairs publications and suggested themes which were also appeared during this research (McEwen, Kodama, Alvarez, Lu, & Liang, 2002).

Recent studies have been found suggesting the interdependence of Asian American ethnic identity with social interactions. The Sue study reported that ethnic identity of Asian Americans was more likely to be influenced by “the situational context and in-group members in defining their identities” (Sue, Mak, & Sue, 1998). Yeh and Huang (1996) also found that ethnic identity of Asian Americans was significantly influenced by “interpersonal relationships and the external forces such as geographic location and the attitudes of the larger culture.”

Kibria (1999; 2002) examined second-generation Chinese American and Korean American students on East and Coast campuses. This study described differences according region and immigration generation which impacted ethnic self-identity and intergroup social behaviors. The Kibria study was significant as a pan-ethnic investigation that described a nexus between ethnic identity and social interactions which became germane to the conceptual foundations of this study.

Although most of the research emphasized definitions according to ethnic identity, the studies on pan-ethnic populations also suggested a changing ethnic identity that was affected by immigration history, social experience, and family culture. The literature review identified the socio-cultural contextual paradigm with ramifications on theoretical and methodological considerations of the study. Because of its intangible nature, culture needed to be examined by assessing its impact through historical patterns of change.

### Racial Identity

The conventional wisdom regarding ethnicity is indicated by Alba who describes ethnic identity as a voluntary preference.

It is not only that individuals can choose to identify or not, and choose also precisely which elements in an ancestry mixture to emphasize and how important an ethnic identity should be for them, but they also have a wide latitude of choice when it comes to manifestations or expressions of ethnicity (Alba, 1990, p. 303).

This viewpoint of ethnicity was based on studies with European American populations to suggest an ethnic identity far different from that described by the research on Asian American experiences. In contrast, studies conducted with pan-ethnic Asian American populations suggest an ethnic identity *permanently* affixed to one's physical appearance and influenced by social perceptions attached to racial viewpoints (Espiritu, 1992; Tuan, 1998). Thus, ethnic identity in Asian Americans can be considered as an *involuntary* racial identity.

Appearing less frequently than ethnic-specific studies, research based on pan-ethnic college student populations identified issues affecting college life that included ethnic considerations, cultural adjustments, and student counseling issues (Sue, 19998; Uba, 1994). Reviews have raised questions concerning the existing research on Asian American racial identity that is based on theoretical models using Black-White experiences which have yet to be validated in applications with Asian American populations.<sup>31</sup> As summarized by Cho, "*There is a tendency to marginalize or render invisible Asian American concerns and to rely on Black/White frameworks that focus on parity as a primary goal*" (Cho, 1996, as quoted in Chang & Kiang, 2002, p. 148.)

Regardless of inherent limitations, there were a few studies that studied pan-ethnic college student populations with useful insights into Asian American racial identity.

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<sup>31</sup> "Almost all racial identity development research is focused on Black experiences in data collection. Though theories exist for other groups, no equivalent research has emerged" (Carter & Goodwin, 1997, p. 308).

Hurtado compared student interactions between racial groups on multiple college campuses, studying differences in demographic composition, student involvement, and institutional characteristics. This cross-cultural study reported fewer interracial interactions with White students that appeared contradictory to self-segregation that were commonly found associated with group behavior descriptions of visible minority students on campus. In addition, Hurtado also suggested external environmental factors affecting racial attitudes and campus climate (Hurtado, 1994).

Critical theorists examined Asian American identity through perspectives affected by social structures such as ethnicity, race, class and gender. After ethnicity, race appeared most frequently scrutinized in discussions of Asian Americans as “model minority,” selective admissions criteria pitting “meritocracy” with affirmative action policies, and interdisciplinary curriculum programs studying Asian American cultural identities.

Discussions of marginalization and stereotyping have appeared in critical analyses of Asian American experiences that appear to challenge commonly-held viewpoints of Asian Americans with respect towards racial identity. Scholars have described Asian American stereotypes as unassimilable “perpetual foreigners” or successful “model minorities” as historical examples of bias and/or exclusion in American society.

The existing literature has reported perceptions of Asian Americans as perpetual foreigners rather than as integrated into mainstream society. Critical reviews of Asian American stereotypes in American society have been described through popular images found in mass media and pop culture (Tuan, 1998; Bernstein and Studlar, 1997).

The “Model Minority Myth” has been extensively studied by Suzuki, who examines assumptions of academic success that can contribute in marginalizing Asian American students (Suzuki, 1997; 2002). Examples of “invisibility” in education have been found in various reports. (Kim, 1996; Kuh, 1988; Delpit, 1995). Historical instances of Asian American success stories have been given as arguments against affirmative action policies (Ancheta, 1998).

These stereotypes have been examined throughout American popular culture. Chang and Kiang suggest Asian Americans may possess “double unconsciousness” through internalized racial self-identities yet appear deny the existence of racism through “the pervasive illusion that Asian American experiences and circumstances fit nicely under one label” (Chang & Kiang, 2002, p. 154).

Critical theorists reviewed possible connections between societal assumptions based on academic success stories and experiences suggesting marginalization, bias, and exclusion. Originally, the experiences described in this area of research did not appear to parallel those that were emerging from this study. However, aspects from this area did appear relevant and were incorporated into the research design. From this body of scholarship, this study used critical analysis during data interpretation, interdisciplinary pedagogy and curriculum development outlined through Asian American Studies programs, and the Omi and Winant Model of Racial Formation.

#### College Learning and Asian American Identity

The final section describes the literature found on Asian American college students that suggests the nature of college learning and campus experiences that appeared to impact student awareness of Asian American identity.



The distinctive academic accomplishments of Asian American students have been previously discussed in the review of demographic data.<sup>32</sup> The factors affecting academic achievements were extensively studied through studied of family life in pre-college settings. The research reported Confucian ideals linked to educational priorities and beliefs of future success in immigrant families (Sue, 1995; Yee, 1998). During acculturation into American society, education was valued by Asian American families through cultural beliefs that taught filial piety, family obligation, and collective family success (Lee, 1998, p. 621; Sue, 1995, p. 278). In fact, *kwae doe* is a Chinese term that refers to the English language and is literally translated “the path of success” (Sui, 2001). These cultural beliefs appear to have already influenced many of these students through demonstrated accomplishments and personal testimonies in this study.

The literature review also revealed qualitative studies examining the influence of non-cognitive factors impacting college learning. For example, Ting studied qualitative and quantitative measures as predictors of first-year academic performance. This study reported a correlation between first-year success and psycho-social factors, including community participation, leadership qualities, and realistic self-appraisals (Ting, 2000). In a recent study, Liang *et al* described the significance of external classroom experiences in developing sociopolitical consciousness which appeared to facilitate identity confrontations during college. The Liang study used the narratives of three students to describe leadership activities facilitating “open learning about issues and feelings of marginality that Asian Americans experience on campuses today” (Liang et al., 2002, p. 85). Tsui examined the relationship between campus culture and student cognition,

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<sup>32</sup> Refer to the discussion of demographic data found in this Chapter.

“Student culture influences many aspects of the college experience, including student learning processes, since it influences those with whom students interact and the values and attitudes they encounter” (Tsui, 2000 p. 422).

Many Asian Americans have reported college as “living away from home for the first time” (Kim, 1981, p. 101). Particularly for this group of students, higher education represents an important educational setting to learn about personal identity while separating from family cultures that may have taught imposed values. The situation for Asian American students in college is compounded by the landscape of higher education noted for an increasing attention to matters of race and diversity (Asquith & Lou, 1993; Levine, 1993). These particular circumstances suggest the significance of higher education as a potential epicenter in community discourse and learning about Asian American identity.

The increasing campus presence of Asian American students has become a catalyst for academic initiatives serving as primary resources for continuing research through Asian American Studies curriculum (Omatsu, 2000; Hirabayashi, 1998). Initially, the research into curriculum and pedagogy did not appear to be relevant to the research questions. However, aspects of this body of scholarship were ultimately incorporated into the research design with a critical inquiry approach that uses the Omi and Winant Model of Racial Formation (Hirabayashi & Hull, 2000; Omi & Winant, 1994).

Since the issue of academic performance did not appear to be within the scope of these research questions, the scarcity of studies in this area did not appear to impact the overall literature review. These studies described learning experiences that occurred

external to the formal classroom environment, yet were significant to college learning by furthering student understandings of Asian American identity.

Campus life appeared described in early studies on Asian American college student populations pertaining to issues of mental health and psychological counseling. Gim *et al* reported an increased severity of concerns in recent immigrant populations, who were also less willing to seek assistance from counseling (Gim, Atkinson, & Whitley, 1990). Other studies reported student difficulties associated with variables in family and immigration experiences. Kiang examined first-generation Asian American students, reporting the influence of immigration history and linguistic capabilities affecting curriculum issues, social interactions, and viewpoints of gender, race, and ethnicity (Kiang, 1992). These reports continued to affirm the concept of Asian American heterogeneity previously described in the literature review on identity.

In a recent study, Hune described “first-generation Asian American college students and those from low-income households” who identified themselves as “outsiders” of the higher educational system, appearing to be unduly penalized academically (Hune, 2002). This study suggested possible difficulties attributed to accent bias and language discrimination as possible sources of stress for first-generation immigrant students. These studies also portray a different picture of Asian American college experience by describing significant difficulties that sometimes require psychological counseling and student affairs support.

Early research at Stanford University began to suggest difficulties of Asian American students attributable to campus climate issues. This study reported on diversity initiatives aimed at ameliorating campus experiences of its minority students. Although

this campus had a relatively large percentage of Asian Americans, “ethnic theme houses” had proven valuable in providing private spaces for Asian American student discussion.<sup>33</sup> There were also reports of anti-Asian behaviors on college campuses that appeared with increasing frequency (Nakanishi, 1993; Ojajima, 1993). Some of these events received national publicity in the press media. These reports suggested a “chilly” campus climate,” originally reported for women, that was now being extended towards Asian American students as well (Hall & Sandler, 1984; Hgune, 2000).

This existing literature identified factors associated with campus life and college learning that needed further investigation as disaggregated variables in this study.

#### Student Voices and Narrative Studies

Since the 1980s, narrative voices articulating the experiences of ethnic Asian Americans have been described primarily through autobiography and memoir (Liu, 1998; Eng, 1999; Mura, 1991, Zia, 2000). The literature review found a small number of personal narratives in the existing literature, as well as calls for increased Asian American voices from legal and education scholars.

In their review of the existing research of higher education, Chang and Kiang acknowledged the increasing significance of such personal narratives “capturing the experiences of Asian American students and, increasingly, of Asian American faculty, often in relation to themes of survival and persistence in the academy” (Chang & Kiang, 2002, p. 138).

Despite a sample size of only three college students, the voices in this study summarized the experiences of Asian American college students found from the literature

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<sup>33</sup> The percentage of Asian American students was reported as 8.2% of the campus population in 1992 (Bunzel, 1992).

review.<sup>34</sup> Student narratives in the Lagdameo study described feelings of marginalization associated with a “silent, model minority.”

It is imperative to deconstruct stereotypes that are rampant among our communities. For Asian American students, who are perceived as the “silent, model minority,” it is extremely important to avoid programs that foster these stereotypes (Angela in Lagdameo et al., 2002).

Angela words suggest the presence of a stereotype originally identified by Suzuki that has received considerable attention from Asian American critical theorists (Suzuki, 1997, 2002).

It is disheartening to attend “diversity” initiatives and a plethora of other similar committees when those who called for the meeting are not present; the administration is represented by graduate students. In addition, there are no public reports on the results of these initiatives. Thus students who have exhausted their efforts and compromised their class schedules to participate feel shortchanged...The community can learn from itself and turn around to teach others, but it must be given room to grow. Students (obtaining) firsthand experience in this is key to their growth in their ethnic and social identity (Angela in Lagdameno et al., 2002, p. 9).

Angela’s description exemplifies the importance of voice in articulating the realities of Asian Americans, who remain defined by both ethnic and racial identities, also contradicting commonly-held assumptions associatd with Asian American students in higher education.

#### Omi and Winant Racial Formation

Since the primary purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of Asian Americans who exist distinctively defined by ethnic and racial experiences, the

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<sup>34</sup> This study included a 1.5 Korean American female student in a small private liberal arts college in California, a second generation Philipina American in a large public research university on the East Coast, and a first generation Vietnamese male attending a mid-sized public research university in California (Lagdameo, Lee, Nguyen, Liang, Lee, Kodemo, & McEwen, 2002).

Omi and Winant Model of Racial Formation was used as an interpretive framework that could accommodate multiple cultural considerations in identity formation.

This Model is conceptually based on explicating the process of racial identity rather than prescribing specific stages according to identity typology. This model accounts for race through *racial* meanings “*which signify and symbolize social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies*” (Omi, 1994, p. 55). This approach assumes racial formation as a social process from knowledge gained through everyday experiences. Racial experiences become internalized into interpretive frameworks for developing self-concepts and worldview perspectives. By this logic, racial perspectives must be examined through cultural perspectives that reflect the surrounding social structures.

The Omi and Winant Model also accounts for racial identity explained through sub-conscious internalized thoughts and conscious awareness. Both forms of identity were found described in this study applicable to minority and majority perspectives alike. Racial concepts that appear common place become unnoticeable over time. Pervasive assumptions become imbedded into societal culture through common meanings. In these instances, racial self-concepts remain unnoticed until some event, such as separating from family culture and moving to college, triggers the emergence of racial self-concepts as race consciousness.

Thus, personal meanings of racial identity may exist at two different levels of consciousness. Racial self-identity may be unrecognized existing in an internalized sub-conscious level, yet also manifest as expressed emotions and/or behaviors which can lead to a conscious awareness or *racial cognizance*. Raceless psyches require the cognitive

shift into a conscious level to develop into racial awareness. This model becomes the basis for explaining racial identity through the voices of all parties at Oxford Hills College; its students, faculty, and administration.

This discussion calls attention to important distinction between the meanings of “*racial*” used to describe a *social structure* and “*racist*” which describes a concept that “*creates or reproduces structures of domination based on essentialist categories of race.*”<sup>35</sup> This model of racial formation describes a process influenced by social structures that must be studied culturally, historically, and institutionally.

The distinction between racial formation and racial identity is noteworthy in many respects. First, the approach may identify specific areas that can be addressed. Second, it reduces the polemics of the discussion by eliminating any values associated with an essentialist label. Third, this approach acknowledges the mutability of racism and racial identity that can change over time and can be used to account for changes. Fourth, by basing the theory on a social structure, applicable to minority and majority and thus may be used as a conceptual foundation for developing an inclusive multicultural philosophy.<sup>36</sup>

In summary, the research of Asian Americans in higher education appears to be a burgeoning area of scholarship to follow anticipated increases of students and faculty on future college campuses. The literature review revealed the need for pan-ethnic studies examining Asian American college student experiences. The existing research based on contemporary Asian American college student experiences was limited either by

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<sup>35</sup> Essentialist refers to applying a label that effectively reduces the qualities of the individual into a single, universal identity, and is suggested as a potential problem as “authenticity” in this study (Omi, 1994, p. 71).

<sup>36</sup> Multiculturalism through “racial polyphony” is the central premise of Tanaka’s (1996) study.

conceptual models of identity or methodologically by limited sample populations. From the literature review in higher education, Asian American college students can best be described as a *heterogeneous population with significant differences according to variables only further understood through disaggregated quantitative and qualitative studies*.

Asian ethnic heterogeneity is distinctive in Asian American experiences. This study considers the integral nature of ethnicity in Asian American college student experiences and other socio-cultural variables such as immigration background, language fluency, and family values. While psychology studies provided some insight into cognitive processes associated with Asian American ethnic and racial identity, socio-cultural research suggested the significance of other factors, such as personal history, social interaction, and community culture.

Historically, meanings of ethnicity appears conflated with race regarding the usage with Asian American identity. This was an important consideration of this research design that needed to examine both factors as possible confounding variables. In discussions specific to Asian American identity, it is important to note that *racial* is a descriptive term as *distinguished from meanings associated with ethnicity*.<sup>37</sup> Studies of pan-ethnic student populations revealed racial experiences distinctive of Asian Americans as visible minority students on campus.

The literature review identified parameters of the research questions which needed to consider cognition through individual behaviors, social interactions, and social factors

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<sup>37</sup> The definitions originated from Omi and Winant (1994) previously discussed in the introductory chapter. *Racial* describes a social category based on physical attributes while *ethnic* refers to a geographic definition of identity.



in the extant community. Theoretical models in existing studies appeared limited in applications towards this project. Instead, the voices of this study described ethnic and racial experiences revealed through a spiraling process between self-identity, reflection, and discovery. This literature review established psycho-social parameters for the research questions and validated the need examine both ethnic and racial identity definitions.

Theoretical models based on social interactionism and Mead Model of Self were able to provide explanations for the student experiences that could account for socio-cultural variables and cognitive processes described in this literature review. This *theoria* became incorporated as the conceptual foundations for this research study (Mead, 1934).

#### *Theoria and Praxis*

The self as a whole, as it appears in social experience, is a compound of the stabilized reflections of the generalized other in the “me” and the incalculable spontaneity of the “I.” If it did not have these two phases there could not be conscious responsibility, and there would be nothing novel in experience. (Mead, 1934, p. 178)

This research study is premised by *theoria* originating from social interactionism and socio-cultural identity explained by the Mead Model of Self. Social interactionism explains cognitive phenomena as knowledge constructed through dynamic interactions between psychological processes and social behaviors.

These philosophic theories describe identity as a fluid entity based on a dynamic existence that changes according to individual circumstances and social interactions. Self-identity formation is dependent on psycho-social interpretations of past experiences.

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Meanings of the past meanings become the basis for one's interpretive framework.

According to Mead, self-identity is necessarily based on personal perspective, a viewpoint in “relation of the individual with the social group in which it belongs” (Mead, 1934, p. 1). This model presumes that individual psychological processes are not constructed in a vacuum. Instead, Mead explains identity cognition constructed as individual interpretations based on a perspective with co-existent I and Me self-identities. I and Me exists within the subconscious mind in continual tension between individuality and beliefs reflected from social experiences within one's surrounding community.

The Me and I exist as separate, but conjoined, entities to comprise the whole Self. Me is influenced by the individual viewpoint and location within the social structure of a community known as the “generalized other.” The Me always operates in constant awareness of oneself relative to this social community. Alternatively, the I signifies a personal response to the "generalized other." I represents individuality expressed through human qualities that are not explained by scientific genotype..

Self-identity is a reflection of the I and Me through the formation of self-concepts, “the organized set of attitudes of others which one assumes.” These are self-appraisals that reflect explicit and implicit messages sent from “significant others” of the surrounding social community. Me and I exist in a continual dialectic hidden within an internalized subconscious. Within the dynamics of Me and I, there is an inherent tension between oppositional forces of social conformity and individual autonomy.

We are individuals born into a certain nationality, located at a certain spot geographically, with such and such family relations, and such and such political relations. All of these represent a certain situation which constitutes the “me”; but this necessarily involves a continued action of the organism toward the “me.” (Mead, 1934, p. 182)

The whole Self represents individual identity as the quintessential essence of a human being. Depending on the circumstances of experience, the realization of the whole Self may exist in either subconscious or conscious realms of experience. Often, the self becomes internalized into the subconscious, habituated through repeated associations during everyday life routines. The subconscious self can become emergent into consciousness through identity awareness. Often these realizations are associated with feelings of conflict, emotional dissonance, and paradoxical meanings accompanying changes in experiences and personal perspective.

The Mead Model describes the *situated self*, a perspective based on self-concepts relative to previous experience and dependent on cognitive recognition. The concept of selfhood as a product of individual experience, social interactions, reflection of public perceptions, and internalized self-identity is germane to the discussions of Asian American identity as a social formation of group-based identity.

According to the Mead Model, racelessness can be explained as a subconscious self-identity that has been internalized through routine habituation during socialization processes with the dominant of the social community-at-large. In addition, the Mead model identifies emotions as a pre-emergent cognitive signal for conscious understandings of self-identity revealed through perspective transformation. This is the theoretical rationale for including considerations of *pathos*, the emotional dimension of human experience, in the final interpretations of the study.

The epistemic foundation of this research is also derived from critical hermeneutic theory that explains self-identity as personal knowledge, only understood as interpreted experiences through sociocultural interactions. This philosophy is germane to this study that explains the significance of Asian American college student experiential learning experiences in higher education.

Hermeneutic knowledge is always mediated through this pre-understanding, which is derived from the interpreter's initial situation.”  
(Habermas, 1987, p. 309)

According to Habermas, personal meanings are understood only through a cognitive interpretive framework of self-identity, based on knowledge gained from past experiences and socialization with the learning community. Therefore, knowledge construction is dependent on the specific circumstances of the experience, individual perspective, and social community. As a form of knowledge construction, learning from experience is mediated by the actual situations and circumstances of time, place, and space, as well as individual interpretive processes that are dependent on perspective reflecting Selfhood and social community.

Perspective is the cognitive meta-framework for knowledge construction through individual interpretation, taking into account the influence of community culture and socialization processes that can affect group-based identity such as Asian American *han* perspective. The significance of socialization and cultural beliefs within the social community to self-identity perspective formation is germane to this discussion of Asian American perspective and ethno-racial identity.

Social interactionism is also the basis for knowledge acquisition in experiential education models that describe learning through bi-directional interchanges of knowledge

between two parties, each acting both as knower and learner. According to this model, education is not limited to the formal classroom setting with designated teacher and students, but also describes learning *in situ* during everyday experiences.

Experiential educational philosophy is relevant to this *praxis* discussion because it is integral to the Oxford Hills culture as an “academic residential community” committed to undergraduate teaching excellence through “living and learning.”

The meaning of any fact, proposition, or encounter is relative to the perspective or frame of reference in terms of which is construed...To understand what something “means” requires some understanding of the alternative meanings that can be attached to the matter under scrutiny, whether one agrees with them or not. (Bruner, 1996, p. 13)

Bruner's philosophy of education is based on social interactionism but places an emphasis on examining the underlying social framework of the learning community to understand the nature of the learning. He also introduces the possibility of multiple interpretations of a single event. The culturalist approach is a fundamental thesis of this dissertation and is premised on perspective situatedness, a viewpoint of self-identity that reflects one's location determined by socialization within the extant community

The Kuh and Whitt model of higher education cultural studies provided the definition of culture in higher educational contexts as the conceptual basis for research design and methodology considerations of this study.

Culture is the collective mutually shaping patterns of norms, values, practices, beliefs, and assumptions that guide the behavior of individuals and groups in an institute of higher education and provide a frame of reference within which to interpret the meaning of events and actions on and off campus. (Kuh & Whitt, 1998, pp. 12-13.)

With this reasoning, experience is necessarily interpreted within a singular academic residential social community setting and meanings of college experience are interpreted from the messages received during associations with multiple social settings.

The meaning of behavior can be interpreted only through a real-life situation within a specific college's milieu. . . a complex web of evolving assumptions, beliefs, symbols, interactions carried by faculty, students, and other culture bearers that cannot be purposefully controlled by any person or group. (Kuh & Whitt, 1998, pp. 12-13, 16)

As an invisible tapestry, culture is based on individual interpretive frameworks that ultimately become enmeshed into the belief structure that governs community practice.

It is the constellation of shared values and beliefs manifested through patterns of behavior like rituals, ideologies, and patterns of interactions. Therefore, culture can shape human interactions and reflect outcomes of mutually shaping interactions (Kuh & Whitt, 1998, pp. 12-13, 16).

Implicit and explicit messages are transmitted during social interactions that affect the formation of individual perspective. Accordingly, individual perspective is a reflection of the community culture.

Colleges and universities are social communities as well as educational institutions. A stroll across a college campus suggests that faculty and students have a form of life all their own, a culture if you will...To understand why faculty and students think and behave the way they do, we must first describe and appreciate their culture (Kuh & Whitt, 1998, p. 16).

Thus, these philosophies of *theoria* are the conceptual foundations for implementation through *praxis*, the research study itself described in the following section. The description of the study provides an overview of this research process that included both quantitative and qualitative data collection methodologies. *Praxis* appears as a continual spiral between two streams of data collected to examine student and

institution with analyses guided by emergent discoveries that affected the course of subsequent investigations.

### Description of the Study

Oxford Hills College was selected as the site for study after campus demographic considerations and pragmatics of on-campus research at its rural location in the Northeast. At the time of the study, self-reported data described a comparatively large Asian community on the Oxford Hills campus relative to student populations in other rural peer institutions.<sup>38</sup>

The institutional description was based on historical accounts of campus life described by its campus representatives, factual descriptions, and Committee reports from archived resources. Descriptions of rigorous admissions standards and competitive selection processes were found on the college website to suggest an elite reputation. Accreditation reviews described curriculum with longstanding reputations in foreign languages with courses that emphasized Chinese and Japanese cultures. The institutional research suggests a reputation of an elite, selective private college, undergraduate teaching excellence, liberal arts curriculum, and “living and learning” campus life.

The institutional perspective establishes the interpretive framework of the college, also necessary for comparison with student perspectives during the final analysis. The voices of students, faculty, and administrative officers describe campus life to suggest the

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<sup>38</sup> At the time of this study, the percentage of composition of Asian American students ranged between five and ten percent of the total undergraduate student enrollment on this campus. The actual data in this study was collected from a smaller subset of the total Asian American student campus population. Figures representing Asian American demographic information are provided as estimated approximations. Because the Asian American demographic information is based on student self-reports and survey collections and used a “snowball” sampling method, it was difficult to determine the exact numbers of Asian American students on campus as well as in the original survey sample pool.

Oxford Hills Experience as distinctive socio-cultural experiences at this distinctive academic residential community.

The conceptual foundations for this study are premised on social interactionism theory and the Mead Model of Self. The research approach is based on grounded theory utilizing multi-disciplinary strategies and convergent interpretation analysis. Repeated themes or patterns identified from the primary data were analyzed for cultural significance as perspectives reflecting the social community-at-large. Emergent interpretive frameworks influenced the research rationale affecting the final analysis of the research data.

The student research was comprised of multi-disciplinary methods of data collected from Asian American community discourse and individual narratives of campus life from 1997 to 2002. Student data was provided through various individual and group activities. Individual narratives were provided by interviews, survey responses, creative prose, and descriptive essays. Community observations documented campus presentations, group discussions, and published campus-wide topic interchanges. This research revealed thematics interpreted from past-present-future meanings to reveal shared perspectives of Asian American self-identity.

College culture exists as an important entity that governs individual behaviors in higher education institutions. Clark describes this yet tacit dimension as a distinctive “saga” representing campus traditions, unique histories, and organizational structures within the institution (Clark, 1970). As the guiding policy for all decision-making process of Oxford Hills College, understanding the institutional *ethos* and campus culture



as a contextual setting is germane to the analysis of campus experience in this discussion (Clark, 1970, p. 13.)

Descriptions of campus life are used to portray the distinctive culture of this academic residential community. Voices of students, faculty, and administrative officials, are used in this study to describe the campus life of Oxford Hills College.<sup>39</sup> The institutional data provided an understanding of institutional perspective as the contextual setting for the campus events that follow.

#### Data Collection and Analysis

Primary student data consisted of common Asian American campus experiences and descriptions of social communities that appeared formative to Asian American *han* perspective. On-campus data collection included observations of various Asian American community functions, public campus discussions, individual student and faculty interviews. Written descriptions were taken from survey responses, published essays, e-mail telecommunications, and newspaper reports.<sup>40</sup> Creative writing samples provided by individual student authors were also used.

The primary objectives of data collection were to identify common pan-ethnic Asian American experiences and explicate these experiences according to perspectives located in campus community settings. Further analyses were conducted to interpret for personal significance attributed to the Oxford Hills College experience that were suggestive of collective Asian American *han* perspectives. The research design utilized

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<sup>39</sup> The voices of campus representatives were originally quoted in autobiographical histories and reports from college committees and campus newspapers.

<sup>40</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, the student data represents campus experiences occurring at Oxford Hills between 1997 and 2002.

both quantitative and qualitative approaches in data collection strategies. The final analysis and findings with respect to contemporary Asian American college student experience were based on the latter approach.

The purpose for the preliminary institutional research was several-fold. First, the background information provided a description of campus perspectives to represent the institutional community and contextual setting to locate Asian American perspectives. In addition, the institutional research also served to provide a composite perspective of multiple social communities that contributes to the institutional culture of this academic residential community. The institutional data provided a general description of the Oxford Hills experience for cross-cultural comparisons with other student groups on campus. Perspectives reflecting the campus culture were interpreted from this institutional research. The institutional research was comprised of historical autobiographical narratives of campus officials and contemporaneous college reports. Findings from the institutional data provided the contextual setting as *bricolage* of campus community perspectives.

Data collection and analysis was guided by *grounded theory* originally described by Glaser and Strauss (1967). This model emphasizes inductive reasoning through *a posteriori* hypotheses, naturalistic experimental settings, and flexible research strategies dependent on emergent discoveries.

The student research represented five years of campus experience from 1997 to 2002. The study actually began in 1999 with campus observations and distribution of semi-quantitative surveys to gather demographic and descriptive data to identify commonalities within this Asian American student population.

During this study, research *praxis* occurred as a continual spiral between multiple data collection methods, interpretation, emergent discoveries, and evolving strategies. The research involved a dual investigative strategy designed to provide data describing both students and institution. Although both quantitative and qualitative research approaches were used, the findings were primarily based on qualitative data.

The discussion of praxis continues through the following Section with details of the actual sequence of events and experiences encountered during the data collection and analysis processes.

### Description of the Quantitative Data

A natural starting point for the research phase appeared to examine any available demographic reports which described the general student population and Asian American students on campus.

The primary source of student demographic data was based on annual freshmen class profiles were originally reported by the College Admissions Office. These reports were also compared with descriptions found in accreditation documents and published college reviews (Accreditation Report, 2000; *Princeton Review*, 2003). A general summary of College enrollment statistics over a five-year period can be found listed in the Appendices (refer to Appenix F). This report categorized the student population according to gender, geographic distribution, race/ethnicity, and high school characteristics that became the basis for the student community description found in Chapter 2.

From the College reports, racial demographic statistics described Asian Americans the largest group of visible minority students comprising fluctuating between

five and thirteen percent of the campus population.<sup>41</sup> Information containing further details specific to the Asian American students was not available from the College. As a result, disaggregated demographic information needed to be collected from other resources.

Initial considerations for the student questionnaire survey came from an interest for more information which could detail social variables such as ethnicity, immigration generation, and socio-economic level.<sup>42</sup> The survey was also intended to elicit descriptive information on family backgrounds and attitudes concerning ethnic/racial identity from descriptions of pre-college and campus experiences.

Because Asian American student membership lists were not readily available, the surveys were distributed by “snowball” sampling throughout the student membership of a pan-ethnic Asian student organization. The responses were collected electronically over a six-week time period. As a result of the administrative method, the survey results represent a self-selected group with an undetermined number of students in the original student sample population.<sup>43</sup>

Despite sampling limitations, the survey responses provided additional background details associated with family, high school, and college experiences. This

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<sup>41</sup> From 1997-2001, enrollment statistics reported percentage numbers of Asian American students fluctuating between five to thirteen percent. See Appendix F: Demographic Description of Oxford Hills Student Population.

<sup>42</sup> These limitations became apparent during the course of the study in “Checking the Box” discussions described in Chapter 4.

<sup>43</sup> The total number of surveys represented approximately ten percent of the total Asian American student population on campus. This study suggests that racial demographic data, based on self-disclosed student information, may underreport the actual numbers of Asian American students on campus.

information suggested possible research topics for further elaboration in subsequent data collection efforts which already included plans for semi-structured student interviews.<sup>44</sup>

Broadly speaking, students ranked family relatively high in importance during pre-college experience.<sup>45</sup> The largest numbers of students came from mono-ethnic and mono-racial family households. Most respondents indicated immigration backgrounds as either 1.5 or second-generation with parents immigrating primarily from China, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan.<sup>46</sup> The early emergence of 1.5/second generation viewpoint was an unanticipated finding which eventually became one of the major themes of this study.

Another unexpected finding appeared with respect to parents' educational attainment levels. Student responses appeared bi-modal with highest degrees clustered at post-Baccalaureate Graduate or High School/Associate college levels.<sup>47</sup> Details concerning the educational backgrounds of family members remained beyond the scope of this project.<sup>48</sup>

The survey questions inquiring about significant Asian American and racial experiences revealed mixed messages concerning matters of race in family, hometown, and school communities prior to college. The surveys revealed similarities in ethnicity, immigration generation, and family life experiences. Furthermore, this data suggested

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<sup>44</sup> The survey responses indicated an overwhelming willingness to provide follow-up information through interviews.

<sup>45</sup> Most students ranked family either first with high school friendships also strongly significant. See Appendix C: Student Survey Questionnaire.

<sup>46</sup> Refer to the discussion of 1.5 and second-generation in the introductory Chapter.

<sup>47</sup> In general, post-Baccalaureate degrees were associated with Chinese and Japanese ethnic groups, while high school/associate appeared more frequently with Korean American students.

<sup>48</sup> This was referenced through non-specific comments repeated during student discussions.

parental educational backgrounds and examples of racial encounters were also significant in Asian American college student experiences. This data identified the areas that needed to be elaborated further through subsequent research investigation and considered in planning the semi-structured student interviews, and other later investigation efforts.

Early in the study, quantitative data was collected from student survey questionnaires and demographic reports published by the College. (See Appendix F). Limitations from quantitative methods eventually led to a shift to qualitative strategies and interpretive data to describe contemporary student experience and campus life at Oxford Hills.

The need for disaggregated information led to the shift to qualitative approaches. This began a “shotgun” approach that gathered data from the community discourse through semi-structured interviews, descriptive reports, retrospective narrative essays, creative writing, campus performances, and group discussions

### Hiatus

Scheduling difficulties due to campus circumstances marked a hiatus during the last phase of the interview process. These circumstances allowed for a period of reflection on the existing data that eventually led to a redirected attention focussed on gathering published materials from library archives and internet databases. Although initially this appeared as an apparent setback, this hiatus eventually proved to be fortuitous by yielding a wealth of institutional data and individual student narratives which eventually cemented the final version of this manuscript.

Data collection finally concluded after three conditions were satisfied. First, the student data needed to identify shared experiences with commonalities through

disaggregated variables such as ethnicity and immigration background. Two, the institutional research needed to provided an institutional perspective consistent with campus events and student experiences described through the perspectives of these students. Last, the descriptions of shared experiences needed to be corroborated or refuted through a separate source.<sup>49</sup>

### Analysis

Student experiences were first analyzed using Lieblich's categorical-content method to reveal common experiences that appeared to be pan-ethnically shared (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). Student experiences were further examined for themes which could describe psychological and social dimensions of human experiences. At this stage, the significance of *narrative inquiry* became emergent, particularly noted in the individual essays of the student community discourse.

These experiences were also examined for self-identities explained through the Mead Model of Self. From the analysis of student experiences, commonalities were found according to past-present-future thematic interpretations to describe ethnocentric perspectives of self-identity based on Asian American family values.

Another emergent finding was revealed in an undercurrent of *pathos* expressed by majority and minority alike. *Pathos* appeared throughout campus discussions on matters of race. Contrary to conventional wisdom, this study suggests the significance of such emotions that may be used to identify a cognitive signal associated with the emergence of racial consciousness. The continual presence of emotions in the voices of students,

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<sup>49</sup> A comprehensive list of the data detailing cross-references with triangulating sources was reviewed internally by the Dissertation Committee. See Appendix G: List of Documents Provided for Internal Review.

faculty, and college official suggests the universal nature of racial perspectives that may contribute to a highly charged campus climate or “polemics of race” commonly described in discussions of diversity and higher education.

Campus experiences are explained through Asian American perspectives of self-identity based on family life and campus culture which can significantly influence social interactions in academic, ethnic and racial experiences. From the themes described from psycho-social experiences and interpretive frameworks which shaped socio-cultural identities, possible Asian American *han* perspectives can be interpreted from the student community discourse and individual narratives. The following chapter describes a *bricolage* of college communities contributing to a vibrant campus life and contextual setting for the student experiences that follow.



## CHAPTER 2

### THE *BRICOLAGE* OF COLLEGE COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES

#### “Living and Learning” in the Academic Residential Community

Continuing this guided journey, this Chapter describes a *bricolage* of multiple community perspectives to establish the contextual setting of the institution. This journey ends with the discussion of *pathos*, emotions that suggest the presence of subconscious perceptions of racial identity throughout the academic residential community.

[Oxford Hills] is a *residential academic community*—in effect, a modern-day version of what Thomas Jefferson once described as an “academical village.” The residential and social component of a [Oxford Hills] education is as important as what happens in the classroom. It must simultaneously foster the values of an inclusive community even as it supports and enhances the central academic mission of the College. (College Committee Report, 2000)

Campus culture included the principle of community which appeared codified in college documents and posted prominently in all campus buildings. This principle appeared to have a talismanic presence on campus, “influencing social interactions between and among all members” (College Historian, 1950).

Oxford Hills defined itself as an *academic residential community*, united by a common mission based on liberal education philosophy. “*Living and learning*” described the Oxford Hills Experience that extended the boundaries of learning from the formal classroom into everyday campus life activities.

Just as learning to learn is a lifetime goal of the liberal arts, so is learning how to learn with and from those who are different from you... You also enter a classroom without boundaries, a course of study not circumscribed by time limits, a learning environment that is as much about people as about place. With few exceptions, never before and likely never again will you live and work in such a small, intimate twenty-four-hour-a-day community, with so many people so different from you (College President, Convocation 2002).

This chapter is a composite of common social experiences within this residential academic community interpreted through emergent themes from “living and learning” experiences. The narrative voices of students, faculty and college officials provided the *bricolage* description of Oxford Hills College through representative perspectives of students, faculty, and administration. Together, these narrative voices establish the contextual setting situating the student experiences that follow.

#### The General Student Perspective

It is clear that undergraduates arrive at [Oxford Hills] anticipating that they will form friendships and have meaningful encounters and relationships with students whose personal backgrounds differ from their own. Well over 90% of [Oxford Hills] first-year students reported that they expected to become friends with students whose interests and family circumstances differed from their own and virtually all (94%) expected to form close friendships with students whose racial or ethnic backgrounds differed from their own. (College Diversity Committee, 2001)

Freshman profiles described students as recent high school graduates having arrived on campus documented by previous academic success. Described as a “heterogeneous student body representative of the world's diversity,” incoming classes represented all major regions of the United States. International students comprised a much smaller fraction of the total class size. Broadly speaking, almost a third of the

students came from the Mid-Atlantic, a fifth from both New England and Western regions, followed by smaller percentages from the South and Mid-West.<sup>50</sup>

Admissions data reported one third of the undergraduate population belonging to a racial/ethnic minority group. Of this group, Asian American students appeared to be the largest sub-population comprising approximately eleven percent of the total campus population. The percentage of “unknown racial/ethnic” students appeared to be the next largest group in comparison to the Asian American student population. All other ethnic/racial groups were represented by single digit percentage numbers.<sup>51</sup>

A review of ethnic student organizations described student memberships representing mainland and Taiwan Chinese, Japanese, South Korean, South Asian Indian, Pakistani, and Vietnamese cultures. Within the Asian American student community, the majority appeared to be Korean Americans, followed by smaller numbers of Chinese and Japanese students.<sup>52</sup>

### Residential Life

There is no better place than in a community of learners for people to grow to understand each other better, to learn how to get along with one another, and to prepare for lives after graduation in an increasingly diverse nation and world. The lives of [Oxford Hills] students should be characterized by substantial continuity and a strong sense of being rooted in a special place (Committee Report on Campus Life, 2000).

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<sup>50</sup> Refer to Appendix F: Demographic Description of Oxford Hills Students.

<sup>51</sup> The admissions data reported African American and Latino/a American groups similarly at six percent and the Native American population approximately three percent of the total student body (College Admissions Report, 2001). A committee report on Student Life compared the institutional demographic figures with peer institutions, reporting “statistically significant” smaller minority numbers on the Oxford Hills campus (Oxford Hills Admissions Report, 2001; Oxford Hills Committee Report, 2000, p. 8).

<sup>52</sup> Because college demographic data were not reported disaggregated by ethnicity, the exact percentages of ethnic groups within the Asian American population could not be determined. An informal polling of ethnic student organizations showed the largest membership by Korean American students. This was also consistent with opinions in student and faculty conversations.

Ideally, “living and learning” experiences were embodied through everyday campus experiences integrated with lessons from within the formal classrooms. The distinctive residential life of “The Oxford Hills Experience” was represented by a thriving campus that appeared to bustle with social activities throughout any given hour of the day. Whether in the dining halls, dormitories, and even on its athletic fields, lively intellectual discussions were observed between students throughout the campus.

The rural geographic location contributed to the residential nature of this closely knit campus community. Most students lived on-campus, selecting from a variety of options offered by the college or through private social organizations.<sup>53</sup> Academic interest affinity houses were available for certain foreign language and cultural studies programs. Individual house arrangements were available for Native American, Latino/a American, African American students, and an Asian residence for Mandarin-speaking Chinese students.

[Oxford Hills College] affords students wonderful opportunities to have flexible college careers, to travel and to study elsewhere. But at the same time, they also foster frequent comings-and-goings and a periodic sense of upheaval for students. There is considerable room for the institution to increase the sense of stability, continuity and attachment that students of earlier eras have long prized during their years of residence at [Oxford Hills] (Committee Report on Campus Life, 2000).

Year-round campus programs, popular foreign study abroad programs, and a variety of student housing arrangements offered flexible options for “living and learning” experiences in this residential academic community setting. Many students described this as a positive feature originally attracting them to this rural residential college campus.

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<sup>53</sup>Less than a third of the students lived in Greek organization living arrangements. (Oxford Hills College Committee Report on Campus Life, 2000).

Despite the bucolic campus setting, student voices and committee reports suggested increasing concerns regarding transience in residential life.

### The Academic Perspective

“Living and learning” at Oxford Hills was attributed to the rural nature of its self-contained educational environment. Historical narratives described college life marked by its freshmen who had left the “distractions of society” to study liberal arts, “the tools of knowledge.” After four intense years, students graduated with self-confidence to become “intellectual pioneers” to lead future society.

The first and primary obligation of Oxford Hills College is to develop the minds of its men, to expand the mental capacity of the individual man by its training, and to enlarge the area with which the mind shall be expected to work by the breadth and comprehensiveness of the subject matter of its curriculum. (College President, Autobiography, 1950)

During the early years, the college mission was to “provide a liberal education as fit for a gentleman at work” and develop leadership through intellectual curiosity” (Oxford Hills College President, Autobiography, 1950). Its academic mission still remains committed to a liberal education philosophy with broad-based course work in humanities, social and behavioral sciences, mathematics, and natural sciences.

For more than two hundred years, students from all over this country--and increasingly the world--have come to spend some of the most important years of their lives at [Oxford Hills]. Here they are exposed to the best that a liberal education can offer: the opportunity to think, to work with a superb faculty, to meet people different from themselves, and to develop a reservoir of skills, knowledge and broad perspective on the world that will sustain them throughout their lives. (Committee Report on Campus Life, 2000).

Published reports described Oxford Hills College as a research university with longstanding reputations in teaching excellence and liberal arts philosophy for its

undergraduates.<sup>54</sup> Students studied common course work based on classical disciplines while the major programs provided preparation for post-baccalaureate graduate and professional programs. The College also had an established reputation in foreign studies abroad programs. Cultural programs were offered through foreign language departments with major concentrations in Chinese and Japanese.

At the time of the study, Oxford Hills College was accredited as a research university that offered graduate degrees at the doctorate level. However, its *sine qua non* remained in the established traditions of liberal arts undergraduate education, reflected through broad-based curriculum coursework, excellence in teaching, and close student-faculty interactions.<sup>55</sup>

First, because Oxford Hills is an academic institution, its core mission should be informed by the institutional commitment to all quarters of American society. Second, whatever their nature, extracurricular initiatives related to issues of difference only advance the conversation or community understanding so far. It is in the structured framework of the classroom that these issues can most substantively be considered—whether it is in response to an article or book that all participants have read, or as part of a reasoned discussion lead by a scholar who brings both academic expertise and pedagogical experience to bear on the discussion. (Diversity Committee Report #1, 1990-1995, p. 28)

The campus culture was defined by its academic mission and “learning and living” experiences in an academic residential community. The academic responsibilities of the formal curriculum affected everyday existence of college life at Oxford Hills.

### Faculty Perspectives on Curriculum

The Arts and Sciences Faculty served as the gatekeepers of its undergraduate

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<sup>54</sup> Oxford Hills College was also known for the reputation of its “established graduate professional programs” (Fiske, 1998; Oxford Hills Mission Statement, 2002).

<sup>55</sup> These ideals were described in national college review reports and consistently expressed throughout college documents including Mission Statement, College Presidential addresses, and various committee reports.

curriculum. Any course changes needed consensus approval from this governing body. Recently, the core curriculum had recently undergone revision to add interdisciplinary requirements that explored issues of cultural identity. Newspaper reports documented faculty discussions to approve the new course requirements. Descriptive reports revealed insight into faculty perspectives that may have been contributory to curriculum issues described by these Asian American students.

Historically, several curriculum initiatives concerning cultural identity had been circulated for approval. Most recently, two versions had been under consideration by the faculty. The first proposal had originated from the Student Assembly and was subsequently approved by the Faculty Curriculum Committee.

The [first] requirement was changed to allow students to “learn about the formation of identities said in a comparative context, rather than in isolation.”...The new requirement is less geography-based and more cultural. This way, students' appreciation of race, ethnicity and migration cuts across maps. (Faculty Assembly President)

This proposal required students to take a course in “race, ethnicity and migration in North America.”<sup>56</sup> In response, an alternative proposal was drafted by two history professors. This requirement stipulated that “students would have to take courses about three of five different general geographical areas, Africa, Europe, Western Eurasia, Eastern Eurasia and the Americas.”

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<sup>56</sup> The original proposal was drafted in 1998. Unless otherwise indicated, all faculty comments concerning the two core curriculum proposals were originally quoted in a newspaper report of a Faculty Senate meeting (Campus Newspaper, 2002).

Structuring the World Culture requirement according to geography ensures that the classification of courses is not influenced by ideology. “Where is Africa?” is much less ideologically charged than the question “Where is the West?” That structuring the World Culture requirement according to geography ensures that the classification of courses is not influenced by ideology. (History Professor)

These two proposals were based on different paradigms of cultural identity. The first proposal examined issues of race and ethnicity with examples based on American experiences. The second proposal explored identity through world cultures, defined by geographic locations. After five years of intense discussions reported in the campus newspaper, a compromise version was finally implemented.

Newspaper articles described ensuing faculty meetings that met to discuss the merits of each curriculum initiative. Most significantly, these faculty discussions regarding core curriculum initiatives revealed insights into the perspectives of its academic gatekeepers.

The constructions of race and ethnicity within our society are uniquely our own and have been shaped by our history. For example, my Post-colonial Literature Course allows students to appreciate how differently societies construct race and ethnicity. (English Professor 2)

I want students to become self-conscious about the intellectual traditions they come from and the intellectual traditions that others come from. Such traditions often transcend geographical boundaries. (Anthropology Professor 1)

I’m afraid that requiring our students to take courses in race, ethnicity and migration would give them a narrow, politicized sense of how race is constructed. (Anthropology Professor 2)

Race doesn't exist. Rather, I see it as a 19th-century social construct that lacks a firm biological basis. (Anthropology Professor 3)

If there is no such thing as race, why is there such a thing as racism? (Anthropology Professor 1)



These reports revealed contradictory perceptions regarding race, ethnicity, and cultural identity that ultimately affected curriculum offerings at Oxford Hills. These comments described distinct preferences expressed towards exploring an ethnic identity defined by geographic location instead of issues of race in American experiences. These discussions were also noted by the inclusion of *pathos*, evidenced as strong emotions appearing throughout faculty discussions and various College Committee Reports<sup>57</sup>

While “intellectual” classroom discussions will not eliminate tension or create a common view of the world we live in, there is no better place for such an examination of issues to occur than the classroom; it is in this setting that ideas can be discussed from a variety of perspectives...with ideally, less emotionalism and under the trained eye of a faculty member. (Diversity Committee Report, 1990-1995, p. 22)

Feelings of ambiguity and aversion could have contributed to the difficulties seeking curriculum initiative approvals that were documented for more than a decade. Understanding the nature of faculty perspectives is germane to the history of curriculum developed to meet the increasing needs of these students.

[This class]has the largest number of Asian and Asian American students in [Oxford Hills] history. Many [students] come to [Oxford Hills] hoping to take Asian American classes. Currently, there are two courses dealing specifically with Asian American issues. (Campus Newspaper, 1999)

Opportunities to study ethnic Asian cultures emphasized Chinese and Japanese languages. At the time of the study, curriculum opportunities examining Asian American experiences were available through two Asian American history courses.<sup>58</sup> Despite the existence of African-American, Latino/a American, and Native American cultural studies

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<sup>57</sup> *Pathos* appeared in committee reports examining issues of diversity and social life at Oxford Hills.

programs, comparable resources were not available to Asian American students at Oxford Hills.<sup>59</sup>

These were the words spoken by an Asian American college historian during a speech made to the campus community. Although this speech was made earlier than the inception of this study, these comments seemed to reflect a tone found in discourse of academic issues and expressed needs reflected by an increasing presence of Asian American students in the demographic population of the Oxford Hills campus community.

The existing curriculum appeared disconnected with increasing numbers of pan-ethnic and Korean American student populations. Historic records over a fifteen-year period described an Asian American Studies Program and repeated Korean American language initiatives failing to pass faculty muster during curriculum approval processes.<sup>60</sup> The predominance of Korean American students accounted for the informal Korean instruction classes taught by fellow students during the past fifteen years. As the enrollments continued to increase, despite repeated requests for formal Korean language programs from the general student and Asian American communities, the Korean

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<sup>58</sup> At the time of the study, these courses were offered through the History Department and taught by faculty with non-tenure track annual appointments. The survey responses were overwhelmingly positive towards these courses. The nature of the tenure/non-tenure track appointment was an important issue to these students who lobbied heavily for the tenure-track appointment of this professor. The positive reports were found in a published letter to administration, survey responses, and casual conversations with students.

<sup>59</sup> The course catalogue and accreditation reports indicated that programs in African American, Latino/a American, and Native American Studies were offered with permanent tenure-track faculty appointments and dedicated administrative support personnel.

<sup>60</sup> Reports published by the campus newspaper and minutes from the Student Assembly and Asian American student organizations documented an Asian American Studies Program and three Korean Language initiatives proposed to the faculty from 1987 to 2002.

American students were forced to learn through informal classes taught by fellow students for over fifteen years.<sup>61</sup>

### Minority Perspectives of “Living and Learning”

Your chief work will be through inconspicuous service to your fellows. But in that service, there will be an element of leadership—often unconscious on the part of both leader and led—which every community, every state must have if it is to be prosperous and happy. This is the leadership of those whose lives have been nourished from the great sources of the world’s life which the University possesses—from letters, from science, from knowledge applied to every side of life’s activities. (College President, Campus Speech, 1997)

The President’s comments spoke to the individualized nature of “living and learning” experiences through messages of leadership, intellectual agency, and critical analysis. Students described imparted feelings of social responsibility and leadership by virtue of this new membership into the Oxford Hills College community. Expressed messages emphasizing individualized learning contrasted with the collaborative approaches found with the Asian American student organizations while collecting data for this study.<sup>62</sup>

In a Commencement address, another past President challenged the soon-to-be Oxford Hills graduates to develop “heightened mental power,” “agency by which men may be induced to think,” and the capability to “question conventionality.” Not only did his speech echo his predecessor’s words of leadership, but these words spoke to expressed expectations for these graduates for “leadership through intellectual pioneerism.”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Newspaper accounts and Student Assembly minutes documented the history of the Korean Language initiatives.

<sup>62</sup> Individualism is traced to British roots of liberal education. Asian American literature indicates that collective values remain prevalent in Asian American family cultures. Yee, Huang and Lew (1998) suggest this cultural conflict as a potential problematic during American acculturation of Asian American families.

<sup>63</sup> This was a general impression from the Mission Statement and public speeches of college officials.

If you seek out the obviously like and like-minded, your comfort might initially seem somewhat greater, but your challenges, I can assure you, will be smaller and your learning will be the less. Leadership comes not only from growing up in a place called home, but from growing out into unfamiliar places. (College President, Campus Speech, 2002)

Specific differences between individualist institutional and collective Asian American cultural perspectives remains an unanswered question. However, an emergent voice from students of color suggest the possibility of different interpretations to the intended institutional messages of “community, leadership, and pioneers.” Minority experiences similar to Adelle’s narrative, suggest “living and learning” experiences different from the idyllic expectations of “The Oxford Hills Experience” portrayed in the above-mentioned Committee comments.

#### “Living and Learning in Dodge”

Adelle had been a student of color during the 1970s. Returning to her alma mater as a recognized scholar of American History, she delivered a Convocation speech likening her “living and learning” experience somewhat akin to the Western pioneers living in a nineteenth century “Dodge Town.”

In our vernacular of the day, [Oxford Hills] was Dodge, the quintessential frontier town in the mythology of the American West. Why Dodge? Well, there was a certain frontier quality to the [Oxford Hills] of the 1970s. Many of the students of color of my day felt extremely marginalized and beleaguered by the atmosphere. When things got to be much, we protested; but our most fervent wish was to leave.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Adelle had attended Oxford Hills during the 1970s. “Many of the students of color of my day felt extremely marginalized and beleaguered by the atmosphere” (Adelle, Campus Speech, 2001).

Although having graduated twenty years prior to this study, Adelle's perspective was consistent with contemporary accounts of visible minority student experiences.<sup>65</sup> Instead viewing herself as the “intellectual pioneer” in the President's vision, Adelle's narrative described her college difficulties as a pathbreaking experience, her footsteps forging new campus directions for her Black Brothers and Sisters to follow in later years.

The search for visible minority campus experiences was not a primary research goal of this study. However, the experiences of these Asian American students seemed to share similarities with accounts provided by visible minority students.

Negative perceptions about [Oxford Hills] affect the racial and ethnic composition of the pool of applicants to [Oxford Hills]. At the other [peer descriptive] institutions, students of color constitute 31 percent of the applicant pool on average. At [Oxford Hills] they constitute only 20 percent of the pool, a statistically significant difference. The perception that [Oxford Hills] environment is less congenial to students of diverse backgrounds is borne out by external surveys.<sup>66</sup>

The pioneerism theme in Adelle's Dodge Town narrative was echoed by the Asian American student community with the analogy to *gam saam haak*, the immigration of Chinese Americans to California during the nineteenth century.

### Asian American Perspectives

*Gam saan haak*: literally translated as ‘travelers to Gold Mountain’; the first significant Asian American immigration movement of Chinese diaspora; a ‘westward’ migration during the 1800s, driven by enticements of wealth and success as gold miners and railroad laborers.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> These accounts were described in student and alumni narratives and reported in various College Committee documents.

<sup>66</sup> This was originally reported by the Dean of Admissions to the Committee on Student Life (Student Life Committee Report, 2000).

<sup>67</sup> Asian American historians use *gam saan haak* as an example of cultural assimilation into American society (Tanaki, 1989).

In two semesters, the Asian American student organizations had organized approximately fifty events on campus, open to the general campus community. The student organizations were managed by a nucleus of committed students who routinely juggled academics with management responsibilities to oversee these student organization activities.

Opportunities for pan-ethnic community discourse existed primarily through ethnic and pan-ethnic Asian American student organizations activities within a co-curriculum administered by Student Affairs. All activities from these organizations, including maintaining an institutional memory, were dependent on the efforts of its student membership.<sup>68</sup>

Jennifer was described as a 1.5 generation Korean American having emigrated from Korea as a child. She described the importance of shared ethnic traditions in providing shared familiarity of common traditions and community sodality.

We also, like the second and third and fourth generations, had to deal with aspects of being United States citizens, but also people of a unique cultural background. I realized that I had found a group of people with whom I could watch Korean soap operas, take my shoes off in a room and not feel uncomfortable, eat with chopsticks, or make rice or eat seaweed with; they are all aspects of Korean culture we have been taught and brought with us to college (Jennifer, Essay, 2000)

Wendy was a second-generation Korean American who described herself primarily as “American,” but shared an appreciation of the same ethnic traditions.

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<sup>68</sup> Some of the original student organizations reported in this study have since been disbanded. Among these were a pan-ethnic Asian American student organization and newspaper publication that served as important sources of student data for this project.

Though many of the Korean students on campus cannot read, speak, or write Korean fluently, we associate ourselves as Koreans at [Oxford Hills], and are willing to share what we know with the community, whether it be through introducing them to Korean foods, music, or dance. (Wendy, Essay, 2000)

Ethnic cuisine provides a distinctive association to Asian heritage through special dishes. Ethnic holidays according to the lunar calendar seemed almost universally celebrated by these students. Max described his family celebrations through familiar foods made with his grandmother's Chinese recipes.

Most of the cultural practices were instigated by my grandmother. Although she did not live with us, we would light incense on Chinese New Year, setting out offerings of chicken, pork, wine, etc. to honor the spirits of our ancestors. Every year, we ate certain foods that had special meanings. I can always see my mother telling me... like noodles meant long life, oysters fertility, fish and harmony, even if I am here for New Years. (Field Notes, Conversation, 1999)

The ethnic student organizations provided opportunities to share family customs while also serving to introduce students to the pan-ethnic Asian merican community.

In our family, it is the Chinese New Year that is the most important holiday. It is more important than Christmas or the January First New Year celebration. We always have to get together with our relatives and have a feast. My mother told me that if you don't show up, it's bad luck for the rest of the year. (Field Notes, Conversation, 1999)

Opportunities were available to take courses studying Japanese language or live in the Mandarin-only Chinese house on campus. Languages studied in the classroom and affinity house, ethnic cuisine, and festive holiday celebrations led to new friendships and community sodality in the ethnic organizations.

In contrast, the opportunities for sharing pan-ethnic experiences through collective discourse were limited, mostly available through extracurricular activities organized by student organizations. The campus resources to support pan-ethnic student interests

consisted of two courses in Asian American history. All other activities were relegated to co-curriculum status, administered through Student Affairs.

Until recently, student appeals for dedicated administrative staff had been unmet.<sup>69</sup> The pan-ethnic student activities existed with few supporting resources and without academic standing. These particular students remained undaunted by these apparent odds and were committed through continual participation in the various activities that provided data for this research.

A historic review of the student activities showed that membership efforts were often spent “reinventing the wheel” with much attention spent on administrative details and budgetary requests.<sup>70</sup> Subsidies for external speakers often needed supplemental funds that were generated by intense student fundraising efforts. In a position statement presented to a College Task Force, Asian American students requested additional resources by describing the efforts of student members.

For far too long, students of color have been forced to carry the burden of diversity training and cultural programming inside and outside of the classroom. This burden of responsibility has resulted in sacrificing aspects of their academic, personal, and social lives. It is critical that Oxford Hills shares this responsibility with the students.” (Asian American Organization, 2000)<sup>71</sup>

The co-curriculum status appeared to have actually diluted efforts actually spent on issues of concern by limiting collaborative activities associated with the community

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<sup>69</sup> A part-time administrative position dedicated to the needs of Asian American students had just been approved at the beginning of this study.

<sup>70</sup> Student organization documents and newspaper articles reported on the periodic progress of student activities.

<sup>71</sup> These comments were part of an Asian American student organization presentation delivered during a campus discussion of future directions to multicultural initiatives on the Oxford Hills campus. These concerns were also explicitly expressed in a College Diversity Committee Report (Student Organization Position Statement, 2000; Oxford Hills Diversity Committee Report, 2001).



discourse. The extracurricular aspect also meant that the lifeblood of Asian American student organizations was heavily dependent on the vitality of its membership that appeared to ebb and flow with graduating classes. The membership dependency issue was evidenced by the loss of two campus publications and a student organization since the beginning of the study. This effect also intensified freshman recruitment that appears in later discussions of campus experience.<sup>72</sup>

Most problematic was the absence of private spaces for Asian American students to share common experiences and discourse as a community. Any efforts to collectively examine issues of identity could only be scheduled in public areas reserved for student organization venues.

It is also clear that many attempts at cross-cultural exchanges and discussions that occur outside of the classroom fail. Minority students often feel that they are on display at these programs. White students often express a fear to speak openly and candidly for fear of offending minority students. Oftentimes, these attempts at cross-cultural or racial understanding are overwhelmed by emotionalism--anger, hurt, and sometimes despair. Therefore, it is important that the college develop a place where students can participate in an honest examination of issues related to race, culture, and gender (Oxford Hills Diversity Committee Report, 1993, p. 22)

Because of the existing circumstances, social activities of Asian American organizations were highly visible to the public eye that could very well have contributed towards a general perception of exclusionary behaviors. The historic research documented concerns of "self-segregation" expressed by students and college reports dating back to the 1960s.

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<sup>72</sup> Refer to the discussions of campus entry and recruitment found in Chapter 4.

The manifestation of one assumption is all too familiar — the inquiry on the part of some whites of why black students or Asian students or Latino students or Native students — students whose identity is racialized — hang out together. We rarely ask why less superficially identifiable groups — Catholic students, Jewish students, lacrosse teammates, a group of women or men, white students — hang out together. (College President, Convocation, 2002)

To date, questions remain unresolved concerning issues of co-curriculum, academic initiatives, and resource allocations that support the needs of increasing numbers of Asian American students. The ramifications of co-curriculum are germane to understanding the distinctive perspective of Asian American students on this campus.

These circumstances represented a continual conundrum to students seeking shared experiences with other Asian Americans under conditions of heightened campus scrutiny.

#### *Bricolage of Community Perspectives*

The institutional research was based on historical and contemporaneous data to provide an interpretation of campus culture through a composite of residential and academic experiences. This *bricolage* was presented through the voices of its community representatives: students, faculty, and administrative officials. Oxford Hills defined itself as a residential academic community united by educational ideals embodied by liberal thought, intellectual curiosity, and teaching excellence. “Living and learning” embodied a philosophy of experiential education.

Historic difficulties in curriculum development were encountered during curriculum initiatives proposed to meet the needs of changing populations of Asian American students. The curriculum emphasized ethnic Asian cultures through foreign language programs. Contradictory opinions and *pathos* were expressed by the faculty to

further complicate the difficult curriculum issues plaguing the Asian American student community.

There were some parallels between Adelle's "Dodgetown," *gam saam haak*, and these student experiences. There were also some major differences as well in the consideration of available campus resources dedicated to supporting the needs of Asian American students. The combination of co-curricular status and limited residential/academic resources exacerbated difficulties regarding Asian American identity which already existed. This *bricolage* description of community perspectives establishes the institutional context to understand the following student experiences.

## CHAPTER 3

### PAST HOME, HOMETOWN, SCHOOL AND HOMELAND EXPERIENCES

#### “Where Are You from?”

The discussion of Asian American *han* continues through interrelated themes of past Home, Hometown, Homeland, and School experiences. Yonsei was a fourth-generation Japanese American who described a common yearning for campus places that was connected to memories of past Home and family experiences.

For undergraduates of Oxford Hills, the search for home begins by leaving the home of their parents. To find a sense of place requires a way of living, the desire to be loved, and the capacity to show love. (Yonsei, Essay, 2001)

The themes in this Chapter are based on past-present meanings interpreted from recollections provided by the student community discourse.

#### Family Ethos: Home and Homeland Values

Family experiences played a significant role in shaping these perspectives with values of from Home and Homeland. Strong beliefs in filial piety, family obligation, and success through education were themes throughout the community discourse. Homeland ethnic traditions, practiced within the Home, became the basis for Diasporic and American-born self-identities described by these students.

#### Chung ge-goo-ri Filial Piety

*Chung ge-goo-ri*, Korean literally translated as “disobedient frogs,” is the title of Korean children’s folk tale that teaches about filial piety as obedience and respect for

parents. Although the folk tale is Korean, the lesson of filial piety transcended ethnic cultures.<sup>73</sup>

Filial duty is an obligation to family elders to “ensure the lineage and prosperity of the Chinese family.” As a “cardinal cultural norm in Asian societies influenced by Confucius,” filial piety represents an *ethos* of familial kinship that affects a broad range of psycho-social phenomena with Asian Americans (Yee, Huang, & Lew, 1998; Lee & Zane, 1998; Wong, 1998; Root, 1998).

While filial piety is embedded in native Asian culture, the existing literature indicates a continued existence with associated changes appearing during Asian American experiences. This fundamental belief has been attributed to socialization strategies and individual self-concepts described by many Asian American family and life course development studies

Pan-ethnic practices that symbolized filial piety and elder respect were commonly described in family experiences. For example, bowing to elder family members is considered a sign of respect that was described by Japanese, Chinese, and Korean students. *Oppah* and *unnie* were names given to oldest siblings in Korean families. Other customs were part of dinner rituals with “father is served first, thanking mother before meals, and always using two hands to give dishes to elder” (Survey, 1999) Paid respects to departed ancestral spirits were given by prayers, incense, and food offerings (Survey, 1999).

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<sup>73</sup> Research in American acculturation experiences described socialization between “Chinese American and Chinese English” that “wash away the practice of filial duty” as well as other traditions that link immigrant Chinese to the American born generations (Oakes, 1993, p. 142).

*Chung ge-goo-ri, kowtow, saebae, oppah, and unnie* were examples of filial piety appearing throughout the recollections of Home. While these experiences suggest patrilineal hierarchy and possible issues relating to authority and gender in family culture, any further conclusions were beyond the scope of this study.

### "Parental Expectations"

Filial piety was also described as the theme in an original dramatic play performed by an Oxford Hills Asian American thespian group. *Expectations* portrayed conflicts associated with family cultural beliefs of filial piety, family obligation, and academic achievement. This play not only described expectations of academic success but also highlighted particular family dynamic issues between parent and child.

The play characters, Ken, Eddie, and Kat, were second-generation Chinese Americans and college students with typically described immigrant parents. Ken was the embodiment of filial piety as a conscientious student enrolled in pre-medical studies at Harvard. Eddie was the antithetical brother appearing as a gangster-dressed image. He showed a distinct disdain for school, instead preferring to speak in "rap" and listen to loud hip-hop music. Kat was a close family friend who had chosen a different college path by majoring in fine arts.

Ken: Sometimes...I'm listening to my parent say all these things and...I don't know who they're talking about. "Harvard," "valedictorian," "captain of the tennis team,"... like, I know it's me they're talking about, and I did all those things, but...it doesn't feel like me. I don't know who this Kenneth is. I mean, I'm not perfect. ("Expectations" Play Manuscript, 2000)

Eddie always appeared to rebel against those viewpoints expressed by his family members. His actions also suggested some jealousy and negative self-esteem that were possible in response to the emphasis on academic success found in this family.

Eddie (thinking to himself in anticipation of a dinner with family friends): Joy, another night of “Hey Eddie, look at how much Ken’s accomplished! Look where Ken’s going to college! Why don’t you try and be more like Ken?” As if I don’t get enough of this crap elsewhere. At least we could save a ten minute car ride if we can just do the Eddie bashing at home. (“Expectations” Play Manuscript, 2000)

Sibling tensions and heightened emotions were elements of the *pathos* communicated through Eddie. His actions seemed to highlight even further the fundamental parent-child differences from the perspective of second-generation Asian American children.

Eddie (in accent, imitating his parents): “Eddie-ah, look how good behaved Ken is. He doesn’t go out every night like you do. Eddie-ah, Ken is really doing well in school, you should try to study like him.” Man, forget that! (“Expectations” Play Manuscript, 2000)

Communicated through drama, Ken and Eddie described experiences familiar to Asian American family experiences of Home. Expectations of academic achievement, family success, and filial piety were common stressors marked by conflicting emotions of anger, disgust, and rebellion.<sup>74</sup>

Students often acknowledged the sacrifices and hardship of their parents. Most were appreciative, but there were some who harbored deep-seated feelings of resentment. Although Ken, Eddie, and Kat were fictional, similar expectations were described by Norman, a second-generation Korean American, in describing his own parents' expectations growing up at Home.

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<sup>74</sup> With sold-out performances, this play served to broaden the awareness of Asian American issues to the general campus community conveyed through the use of drama and role play. (“Expectations” Play Manuscript, 2000)

They may be proud of my "accomplishments" to some degree, but they rarely have any encouraging words to say to me without negatively impacting another family member. I just don't like this negativity and that my parents can't just accept their mistakes and move on. I think the hardest part to deal with is that they always project their problems and mistakes outside of themselves. I'm surprised that I'm the way I am, having grown up with my parents, but I guess I never really looked to them in any way outside of provider and they've never really tried to influence me besides the "ACHIEVE ACHIEVE ACHIEVE" mantra. (Norman, Essay, 2001)

#### "Work hard!" Family Obligation

The family *ethos* was also projected through themes of sacrifice and obligation in the community discourse. Kim was a second-generation Korean-American who had recently graduated from Oxford Hills.

Of course, everyone's relationship to their parents is their own business, but imagine the conversations you could be having with them if you could speak to them in their native tongue. Have you ever thought how difficult it must have been to get here? Imagine how you would start a family in a foreign land with a foreign culture? (Kim, Essay, 2001)

After traveling to Korea, the Homeland of his parents, Kim eventually began to understand the difficulties experienced during immigration and acculturation into an American existence. His voice described the significance of Korean language fluency in learning about his parents' Homeland experiences that revealed further understanding of the values that had been taught while at home. His personal narrative continues in a later discussion.<sup>75</sup>

Annie was a 1.5 generation Korean American who was born in Korea and immigrated during childhood. Her parents were naturalized citizens who owned an Asian grocery store.

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<sup>75</sup> Kim's autobiographical essay had originally been published in the campus newspaper, written in support of a proposed Korean Language Program. His experiences are detailed in the student narratives in Chapter 5.



My parents worked long hours and four jobs so my brother and I could afford the things we needed like glasses, braces, and nice clothes. They sacrificed so that I could attend an institution like Oxford Hills. As graduation looms before me, being Asian American is, now more than ever, recognizing these sacrifices. And about doing something with my life that is worth all the time and energy that my parents have put into it. (Annie, Essay, )

During her college years, Annie understood her parents' financial situation through their efforts dedicated to the college education of their two children. Her words embodied common associations with family sacrifice and working hard found in the community discourse. These themes were reminiscent of the "working class" Asian American immigrants portrayed through stories of "rugged individualism," perseverance, and educational success (Wong, 1990, p. 231).

Of particular note, Norman's voice describing the profound influence of Home and Homeland is echoed through Gavin in a later narrative. Norman recognized his parents' expectations resting on his shoulders as the eldest son of the family.

Y'know, I've been reading about Korean migrants for my documentary project and realize a lot of it's true. I don't want to live a life really far from my parents. They brought me up and provided for me and to be honest, maintaining some sort of relationship with them is the least I can do...Of course it won't be easy. Parents in Korea are expected to live with the first-born son and well... that's me. Of course things are different in the United States. They pushed me hard to get well educated and although we both know it's mostly for my sake, we both also know that it's also for their security as well. (Norman, Essay, 2002)

This Chapter described American acculturation from the perspectives of 1.5 and second-generation students through their stories of past recollections. The lessons of Home included an *ethos* of "hard work" and "family obligation." Strong emotional connections within Asian American families appeared to reinforce ethnic identity and Homeland traditions. Notable differences between immigration generations continued to be expressed during college. Acculturation contributed to parental expectations of

family success, hard work, and obligation created external pressures that would persist during the college years of these students. This thematic will continue to be discussed in later chapters.

### "Kwae doe" The Language of Success

*Kwae doe* is a Chinese phrase literally translated as "the English word path" that refers to the common belief of English fluency as the "single path of success" for Asian American families (Sui, 2001).

English proficiency varies markedly in Asian American populations corresponding to the degree of acculturation into American society. Bilingual research describes English proficiency as a "cognitive academic language proficiency" providing basic interpersonal communication skills that correlates directly with academic achievement and successful American acculturation (Cummins, 1983, as cited in Trueba, 1993). Differences between immigrant and American-born generations were also reflected through speech patterns and language acquisition preferences in this study as well.

Ben appeared as a second-generation Chinese American who grew up in a predominantly white suburban community.<sup>76</sup> Although raised in a Chinese-speaking household, he described an assimilatory experience that reflected *kwae doe* beliefs. His linguistic turning point occurred when he entered American schooling and stopped speaking the language of his Homeland.

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<sup>76</sup> Ben did not provide specific details to identify his immigration background. However, his description appeared consistent with other second-generation accounts. (Essay 1999)

At home, my mom and dad spoke in Mandarin (Chinese) to each other. I don't remember this but they said I used to be able to speak Chinese. But then, once I started kindergarten, I stopped speaking it but I didn't speak English either. My mom told me I never talked in class. That's hard to believe because I can't shut up sometimes. Now, I can understand people if I'm in a restaurant or in Chinatown, but can't speak it to save my life. (Ben, Essay, 1999)

Ben's parents spoke to him only in English at home, typical of *kwae doe* practiced in Asian American acculturation experiences. Eventually, he lost his Chinese speaking ability after entering kindergarten. For Ben, much of his Americanization began with his experiences in American schools and English learning.

Zoe was distinctive in this student community. She described herself as a third-generation Chinese American who was a "minority within a minority" in the Oxford Hills campus. She had grown up in monolingual English-speaking household in a cosmopolitan city nearby to a large Asian American community. Although her parents only spoke English, they sent her to study Chinese on weekends.

I felt coming to [Oxford Hills], I had a pretty typical story. I spoke only English at home. My parents made me go to Chinese School when I was younger. (Zoe, Campus Presentation, 2001)

It was clear Zoe had grown up aware of her ethnic heritage. Chinese School provided her with weekly lessons in Mandarin Chinese. This routine could not provide her with a sufficient understanding of Chinese traditions. Upon arriving at Oxford Hills, Zoe initially did not appear to share much commonalities with other Asian American students. Eventually, curiosity about ethnic heritage led her to join the student organizations, "I find myself trying to reconnect after I started to regret not learning Cantonese" (Zoe, Campus Presentation, 2001).

Zoe's experiences seemed to embody the experience of early acculturated families that moved into predominantly white suburban neighborhoods.<sup>77</sup> While the value of speaking Chinese was recognized in Zoe's family, lessons from weekend classes could not be reinforced in an English-only Home environment. Zoe's "minority within a minority" perspective was unique as a third-generation Asian American. Her voice will continue the description of college in the next Chapter.

Not only was education recognized as a priority of Asian American families, but *kwaedoe* recognized the value of English fluency a future vision of immigrant family success into American society. These values were part of family Home cultures that reflected Asian-American immigration and American acculturation.

Both Zoe and Ben suggest a paradox between English fluency and ethnic identity that can result in a cultural schism between immigrant and American-born generations.<sup>78</sup> The details of a socio-cultural linguistic schism as a conflict between ethnic Diasporic and American-born identities are provided in the following section through a continued discussion of family life and Home.

#### Socio-Cultural Linguistic Schisms

In ethnic communities, shared language was often a comforting reminder of one's native traditions serving as a common cultural bridge between native Asian ethnic and American-born students.<sup>79</sup> The collective experiences associated with Homeland cultures

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<sup>77</sup> Chinese and Japanese populations were the first Asian Americans to immigrate to the United States.

<sup>78</sup> *Kwaedoe* philosophy may reflect an internal cognitive schema where meanings are derived from processes more aptly described as linguistic translations of verbalized or explicit messages rather than from cultural implicit values. This suggests possible implications particularly with first-generation Diasporic cultures and warrants further multicultural study.

<sup>79</sup> Yu (1983) further details the cultural and economic significance of educational experiences in mainland China to Chinese Americans living in the United States.

were generally described as positive and supportive. An alternative picture was presented by Norman who described parent-child difficulties to illustrate the socio-cultural linguistic schism between ethnic Asian Diasporic and American-born generations.

Well, it's me...I don't really know how aware of my Korean heritage I was until I went to school as the language barrier slammed me in the face. Undeterred by my inability to speak English I went on to start to excel in school, learning everything on my own, since my parents weren't of much help. (Norman, Essay, 2002)

Difficulties in communication and English language proficiency for adult parents may be contributing factors towards the socio-cultural linguistic schism described in this study (Trueba, 1993).

My parents' ability to speak English is also highly limited, so although we're both able to listen to some degree to what each other say, it's nearly impossible to respond in any fashion outside of a very limited set of words. Because of this, establishing a relationship with them in which we can share any sort of mutual dialogue is near impossible without one of us trying to attain some additional proficiency in the other language. And God knows I'm willing to learn, but the feeling isn't shared on the other side. (Norman, Essay, 2002)

Norman's account described how limited language communication skills affected the interactions of first-generation parents with their Americanized children. His account of family life suggested the existence of a widening disjunction between foreign-born and American-born cultures. Jessica, a second generation Korean American, echoed Norman in describing similar parental conflicts.

As long as I can remember, exceptionalism has been the rule in my family. My parents struggled against much resistance, to inculcate in me a sense of difference. At ten years of age, the subject of attention was sleepovers. At fifteen, curfews. And still now, at 21 years of age, this sense of filial obligation is a constant in my life, and in the conversations I have with my parents, particularly when we disagree. (Jessica, Essay, 1998)

Sleepovers are common social events between friends growing up in America.. Jessica's childhood appeared as a struggle between Asian American family values and American lifestyles. Jessica's voice also suggested growing frustrations with an increasing linguistic disconnect from her Korean heritage during her college years.

I could easily articulate Hegel's theory of the dialectic, but I have trouble communicating to my grandmother, my second mother from birth, what educational opportunity has meant in my life and why it's so important to me to dedicate my life to make sure others have the same opportunity. I find myself "thinking" in English and struggling to find the appropriate words to translate into Korean. Often, nonsense results. (Jessica, Essay, 1998)

These experiences were echoed by many students in Asian American student community. Particularly emphasized by the Korean-American students, these voices described the significance of ethnic language fluency to understanding Home as ethnic culture and family heritage. Furthermore, these students also illustrated the influence of ethnicity and immigration as a distinctive Asian American heterogeneity.

Also significant was the emergence of socio-cultural linguistic differences from interconnected beliefs associated with *kwae doe*, academic expectations, family obligations, and filial piety. The implications from this linguistic schism suggests the change in the usage and cultural significance of language evidenced through contrasting immigrant and American-born perspectives.

Instead of linguistics used as a communication device that communicates meaning through literal translations, language fluency becomes an important skill for cultural transmission between ethnic and American cultures. The socio-cultural linguistic schism seemed to particularly affect Norman as a diminished self-confidence in dating and marriage.

Furthermore, I don't know if I could really make decisions concerning cultural heritage and passing it on. I don't think it's fair to hand this Korean appearance to anyone and yet not pass on elements of its culture and language, but I'm obviously not wealthy source of such. I don't know. . . (Norman, Essay, 2001)

These voices growing up with expectations of filial piety, family obligation, and future success. Their narratives suggest family cultures emphasizing ethnic traditions, English language, and academic success. Beliefs emphasizing academic performance and educational priorities were driven by Asian American immigration and acculturation experiences.

Diaspora describes the migration from ancestral Asian Homelands across the Pacific to American Hometowns for approximately twelve million Asian Americans today (United States Census Bureau, March 2001). Whether first- or fourth-generation, these voices articulated the continued influence of American immigration experience in the formation of Asian American perspectives.

The Homeland lessons of childhood were part of acculturative experiences that instilled an *ethos* of obligation, piety, and academic expectations. These values were tightly held in family cultures, so much that these lessons transcended ethnic and immigrant boundaries and re-emerged during campus experience.

In the context of Asian American diaspora and immigration experiences, these narrative described ethnocentric perspectives through a duality of Diasporic and American-born generations and family *ethos* emphasizing family values and ethnic traditions. While these lessons instilled a common *ethos* often attributed for the successes of Asian Americans, these voices also revealed the existence of significant socio-cultural linguistic differences which would continue to impact the lives of Asian

American students during the college years. These lessons of Home and Homeland particularly significant to self-perceptions contributing an ethnic self-identity.

The socio-cultural linguistic schism underscores the significance of immigration history in Asian American *han* expressed through parent-child conflict and distinctive Diasporic and American-born perspectives. The appearance of this socio-linguistic schism contrasted with impressions of a closely-knitted social unit often associated with Asian American families. These findings seemed paradoxical in considering the original expectations of these Asian American families to benefit collectively from academic experiences, instead appearing as a widening cultural disconnect mostly between parent and child.

#### Self-Images from American Hometown and School Experiences

Other themes influencing Asian American self-identity perspectives were found associated with American Hometown and School experiences. The varied nature of this population is further described by American Hometowns that ranged from heterogeneous communities with mixed racial/ethnic populations to other communities that were described as homogeneous, predominantly White. The narratives of these Hometown experiences began to reflect viewpoints seen through a new racial perspective.

#### American Hometowns

Hometown environments differed in demographic populations and lifestyles ranging from cosmopolitan to suburban. This student community was comprised of students from all regions of the country.<sup>80</sup> However, the greatest number of questions concerning the meaning of an Asian American identity came mostly from students who

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<sup>80</sup>This theme was found in campus conversations and published discourses.



had grown up in predominantly white environments who reported minimal contact with Asian American peer groups.<sup>81</sup>

Arthur came from a cosmopolitan city with frequent access to a nearby Chinatown. He was a committed supporter of the Asian American student community, participating widely in the community discourse by sharing his viewpoints as a second-generation Chinese American.

Being Asian American is having the best of both worlds. It's playing Nintendo with your brother and eating *dim sum* with your parents. It's bonding with everyone in your community and everyone in your household. It's always knowing who you are, where you are going to go, and where you can always go back to. Even after being out here for four years, I know I can always go back to New York City. (Arthur, Campus Presentation, 2001)

Arthur appeared comfortable with his Asian American self-identity as a continual cultural navigation between two distinctive worlds. The degree of comfort with Asian American self-identity seemed to often differ according to American Hometown cultural experiences.

Jared's Hometown experience in a MidWest town was very different from Arthur's. His essay described understandings about Asian American identity that had come to him only recently.

Growing up, I learned about America's immigrants from school history lessons and novels. I watched endless films about Ellis Island, learned all about the different European populations which came over at different times, and read stories about plucky immigrant kids who lived in Jewish slums or New York City. In high school, we studied the conflicts between immigrants who came from different European countries, but never even heard of immigrants from other continents. I remember thinking that immigrants from other continents had only recently begun to arrive, that non-European immigration was only a recent phenomenon...

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<sup>81</sup> The survey responses and conversations suggested concentrations in cosmopolitan New York and California locations. (Discussion Forum 1999).

Despite having a fairly wide range of experiences and an extensive education, I did not learn about Angel Island and Asian American immigration until 2 weeks ago, at the age of 21. (Jared, Essay, 1999)<sup>82</sup>

In contrast, Luke came from Hawaii, a state where Asian Americans comprise a majority of the existing island population.<sup>83</sup> His background familiarity with Asian American culture appeared as an exception to most of the student experiences described in this study.

I never really had to identify myself as being this as opposed to that, being in this socioeconomic class and not in a more preferable one; and never even really identified myself as being Asian. At home, I would normally say that I was Hawaiian, Japanese, and Chinese and it was not until I got to college that it was made evident that I was categorized as being Asian. (Luke, Essay, 1999)

Luke's recollections described growing up in a Hawaiian Hometown where acculturated Asian American culture had been the social norm. These narratives described students who came from a broad range of Hometown communities that influenced different perspectives of racial identity.

Other factors also appeared to be significant to Asian American *han* perspectives. To a lesser extent, social interactions found in the following School recollections suggested additional insights as well.

### School

In addition to the School experiences previously mentioned in the discussion of *kwaē doe*, some students also described social experiences from School recollections that

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<sup>82</sup> Angel Island was the primary immigration station for the West Coast. This location served as the entry point for the majority of the Chinese and Japanese immigrants during the early 1900s. Takagi (1989) describes the Asian immigrant experience at Angel Island and contrasts it with the European immigrant experiences at Ellis Island.

<sup>83</sup> Because the population norms in Hawaii are so different from the continental mainland, Asian American researchers argue that this population may skew findings for Asian Americans in general. Tanaka (1998) suggests separating any results obtained from this group or eliminating this group from the sample population when designing comparative Asian American psychological research studies.

had influenced aspects of their Asian American identity.<sup>84</sup> Scott was as a second-generation Korean American from the Midwest. His story hinted at difficulties affecting Asian American students while in high school.

In high school, I met a lot of Asians, but most of them were troubled. Doing drugs and partying. So I hung out with them for a year because I thought they were cool, and I just grew up and moved on. My group senior year had all ethnicities represented. (Scott, Survey, 1999)

Scott was one of few students who specifically described participating in Asian social scenes during high school. Scott's high school experience illustrates social distancing, a behavior that appears throughout discussions of campus life in this study.<sup>85</sup> Distancing between Asian Americans during college appeared more common with students from predominantly White homogeneous Hometown communities.

Janice was a second-generation Chinese American who described her School experiences with social distancing behaviors. She described a household with her “stay-at-home mom” who was “mostly Chinese and very little exposure to English” (Survey 1999). Although she did not speak directly to linguistic difficulties, her narrative suggested English acquisition beginning in kindergarten when “placed in an ESL class” (Survey 1999). Janice did not appear to consider an Asian American identity while growing up, “I did not feel differently from other kids at all and really had no issues with race until high school.” (Survey, 1999).

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<sup>84</sup>After families, survey responses rated high school friendships next highest in importance during pre-college experiences. From the questions of high school and home community, the survey responses suggested that the racial/ethnic composition of the social scenes varied according to the existing home community racial/ethnic profiles. In other words, students who grew up in predominantly white communities would consistently describe “hanging out” in similarly described social scenes and those in heterogeneous communities most commonly described friendships with mixed ethnic/racial social circles.

<sup>85</sup>The issues of the “troubled Asian youth” at Scott’s high school are beyond the scope of this project but warrants future study.

But beginning in high school, I began to attribute some negative things to my race. I sometimes blamed my being Chinese for things such as not having a boyfriend, or not getting asked to formals, etc. I also tried to be “un-Asian” by joining activities that I thought the typical Asian wouldn’t participate in, such as cheerleading. (Janice, Survey, 1999)

Janice described her strategy to “become un-Asian,” deliberately avoiding any appearance of “Asian” behaviors and social scenes.

But I do have issues with going out with Asian guys. It’s almost like there’s too much pressure there, especially since my father would really like me to marry another Asian, preferably Chinese. Maybe my avoidance of relationships with Asian guys is another way of rebelling against my father, or maybe I like to promote inter-racial dating. I really don’t know. (Janice, Survey, 1999)

The narratives of Scott and Janice described their perspectives of “Asianness” which affected social decisionmaking processes prior to college. These recollections suggest racialized self-identities associated with homogeneous School and Hometown cultures. While these behaviors may be attributed to teenage adolescent issues, these experiences appeared associated with social interactions in homogeneous White communities. These narratives described viewpoints that were seemingly unfamiliar with racial self-identification, but yet the following experiences suggest an omnipresent nature of Asian American racial perspective.

### Laowei

*Laowei* is a Chinese word literally translated as “old outsider.” Its current usage means “foreigner” and has been described by visitors of Mainland China as the experience that labels the White male face “by almost every Chinese person within fifty yards” (Kelty, date unknown). Martin was a White student who grew up in an affluent

suburban Connecticut city. He had recently returned from a semester abroad where he had been dubbed *laowei* by native Chinese.

The reason why is obvious. For me, a white-skinned, brown haired American in a sea of Asian faces, the comfort of anonymity was painfully out of reach...I felt that I was always performing in China as well. Nothing I did was in obscurity. My face would flush with embarrassment, which usually would exacerbate the taunting even more.” (Martin, Essay, 2000)

For Martin, he could only really understand what it meant to be racially identified only after his semester study abroad experience. His *laowei* experience described the importance of immersion experiences in different cultures. Martin's example also demonstrates the presence of a racial viewpoint in Asian ethnic culture that may appear subconsciously internalized due to its pervasive character.<sup>86</sup>

This *laowei* experience appears in contrast with general impressions from the student community discourse that described very little family discussions pertaining to matters of race in past Home experiences. The majority of survey responses indicated Home experiences where “discussions of racism and discrimination rarely occurred.”<sup>87</sup>

Diana described herself as a second-generation Chinese American with parents originally from Taiwan. When asked about important factors influencing her ethnic/racial identity, she answered with “the place where I grew up (predominantly, if not totally white), the friends and people I interacted with...the way in which I was raised had not very much emphasis on Chinese culture or traditions” (Diana, Survey, 1999).

Despite the prominent absence of discussions pertaining to race, there were a few instances that alluded to racial issues as difficulties in Asian American family life.

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<sup>86</sup> The *laowei* description in this discussion is used to illustrate the existence of a socialized racial perspective and not intended to imply perjorative connotations towards any social groups.

<sup>87</sup> Refer to Appendix C: Student Survey Questionnaire

Diana's candid response provided details that began to suggest how subconscious viewpoints of race may influence social interactions such as through dating preferences and family conflicts.

We never really talked about racism, but my parents made it pretty clear that they wanted us to marry Koreans. I remember when my sister was dating an African-American, I couldn't stand the fights she had with my parents, so I decided to shut up about talking about who I date at home. (Diana, Survey, 1999)

This was the only time Diana remembered a racial issue discussed by her family, yet appeared to be a lasting impression that revealed expectations regarding interracial dating. Through her sister's unfortunate situation, Diana also learned about avoiding future confrontations with her parents. It could be that such similar experiences were unspoken but may have contributed to silence and avoidance that are suggested in later Chapters. Regardless, most students described themselves unprepared to navigate the "polemics of race" used to describe the Oxford Hills campus culture (Faculty Interview, 1999).

Kevin was a second generation Taiwanese-American who did not appear to self-identify by ethnicity, "I don't bias myself one way or another." He described his friends in "heterogeneous" social circles which "matched that of the general ethnic distribution." His most meaningful experiences included "proving myself in terms of being able to compete athletically" and "overcoming stereotypes of being an Asian that plays a string instrument and is interested in medicine" (Kevin, Survey, 1999). Kevin's narrative seemed to reflect an awareness to Asian American stereotyped images found reported in contemporary American popular culture (Lee, 1996; Hamamoto, 1994; Bernstein & Studlar, 1997).

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Erik was a second-generation Chinese American who distinctly recalled the first time he saw himself viewed as “foreigner” while shopping with his brother for a Mother's Day card.

I remember when I was 6, my 3-year-old brother in the Hallmark store... and she said to him, “Well, I guess they don't have manners where you come from.” Until then, I thought of myself as coming from the same place as everyone else from my town but I guess that wasn't the case anymore. (Erik, Survey, 2001)

Erik also recalled in a playground conversation being told “I was yellow and that he [his friend] was white, so his mom told him.” Childhood memories of Hallmark cards and school playgrounds are common childhood memories. For Erik, these reminiscences sent messages which that may have persisted even during his college years. Erik's voice will continue in a later chapter.

Yvonne was a naturalized American citizen. Her self-description described growing up in “a very diverse” home community, self-identity as “*Korean with US Citizenship*,” and family heritage celebrating “*Un Dong*,” Korean Independence Day. Her survey responses described an ethnocentric self-identity. Yvonne also appeared to eschew a racial self-definition in her response to the question inquiring about the importance of racial identity while growing up. “*No need [for racial identity] cuz I believed I was the best and everyone admired the fact*” (Yvonne, Survey Response 1999).

Erik, Yvonne, and Kevin alluded to perceptions tied to their physical “Asian-ness” communicated through explicit and implicit messages. Their voices articulated different interpretations from similar realizations. Feelings of difference were learned at an early age from School and Hometown experiences. are marked by the central mission to relocate and integrate into American experience.

These childhood memories suggested profound significance in shaping the perspectives of these Asian American students. Most narratives described growing up in their American Hometowns without much consideration given to matters of race. Yet many students described social experiences such as exhibiting social distancing behaviors and expressing ethnocentric "race-free preferences."<sup>88</sup> These same voices would later describe profound realizations of racial identity as visible minority students while at college as well.<sup>89</sup> Often, these revelations may have begun with another commonly described experience, "Where are you *really* from?"

"Where are you REALLY From?"

"Where are you from?" is a question we all routinely ask one another upon meeting a new person. "Where are you *really* from?" is a question some of us tend to ask ourselves selectively. (Wu, 2002, p. 79)

Often, introductions are opportunities for self-identifying those core characteristics that are most important to one's self. The nature of introductory experiences may reveal insight in unspoken assumptions attached to racial similarities.

A commonly described experience of Asian Americans begins with the question asking "*Where are you from?*" that reflects tacit meanings from the actual intended question of "*Where are you REALLY from?*" This experience has been noted to signify "perpetual foreignness" leading to perceptions of Asian Americans who are "figuratively, even literally returned to Asia, and ejected from America" (Wu, 2002, p. 79; Liu, 1998;

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<sup>88</sup> There were also broad references to "difficulties due to racism" and "racist experiences" written in a few survey responses. Some students recalled being plagued by malicious teasings and perjorative labels. Examples included "people making fun of me because of my race with that Chinky Twinky stuff" and "Chinese, Japanese, look at these dirty knees."

<sup>89</sup> Students described similar racial experiences in various foreign study programs located in Africa and Asia.



Tuan, 1998). This experience was commonly mentioned anecdotally during this study.

All seemed to share similarities with Ardith's account that was described during a group discussion.

I'm glad people are interested in diversity but really tired of being asked "Where are you from?" when really, they mean "Are you Chinese, Japanese, or whatever?" It goes something like this...Just as I am getting to know someone, I'll get asked, "Where are you from?" (Ardith, Group Discussion, 1998)

On this campus, variations of the original experience have been described as "The Name Game," where non-Asians ask Asian Americans their ethnic origin in a typically circumspect manner. At one of the discussion groups, one student described her version:

Knowing what they really are asking, I'll just answer New Jersey. Then invariably, the next question will be, "No, where are you REALLY from?" So I'll tell them I moved to from New York City when I was two. After that comes "Where were born?" Depending on my mood, I can keep this game up by saying "in America" or I can cave and tell them "I'm Japanese." (Ardith, Group Discussion, 1998)

In college, where students are constantly meeting new students in new classroom, dormitory, team environments, this was also familiar for Asian Americans during their four years on campus as well as after graduation.<sup>90</sup> While it can be argued that this could simply be reflection of innocent interest in ethnic origins, it was a reminder for Asian Americans of continual assumptions of foreignness that were linked to physical appearance rather than to American heritage.

Not that it really matters because then sometimes I get the "Oh, I knew such and such who married a Japanese women." or "I have a friend who adopted a Japanese child." Like so what does that have to do with me!? It's always like you have to go through this and MAYBE you can talk about things that share above and beyond the race thing. (Ardith, Group Discussion, 1998)

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<sup>90</sup> Anecdotes in group discussions, interviews, published essays.

"Where are you *REALLY* from?" has been commonly described by Asian Americans when introduced to new social settings, even occurring during introductory experiences during campus entry beginning in the next Chapter. The continued frequency of this experience serves as a reminder that aspects of Asian American identity remain permanently defined by physical appearances.

### Perspectives of the Past

This chapter described factors influencing the formation of ethnic/racial identity. Past-present meanings were used to interpret themes emergent from recollections of past Home, Hometown, Homeland, and School. These narratives described the significance of social interactions within communities, suggesting a perspective intertwined by ethnicity, family values, and subconscious racial viewpoints. In doing so, these voices provided insight into the complexities of a heterogeneous Asian American *han* influencing self-identity and interpersonal relationships.

Significant differences were described according to ethnocentricity, American immigration history, and native ethnic Asian languages. Tensions also appeared between ethnocentric perspectives that highlighted socio-cultural linguistic schisms between Diasporic and American-born immigration generations.

Recollections of Home and Homeland emphasized family values that included filial piety, obligation, and family success. These voices described the importance of ethnic identity understood through cultural identity and ancestral heritage. Whether ethnic-Diasporic or ethnic American-born, these narratives describe perspectives influenced by family life with significant sociocultural differences according to immigration history and ethnic Asian language considerations.

These students also described a common search for meanings of Home during college. Meanings of “*Where are you from?*” implied by “*Where are you REALLY from?*” began to reveal the existence of tacit assumptions attached to racial identity of Asian Americans in American Hometown and School communities. Finally, these voices suggested an Asian American *han* understood through racial identity that impacted individual behaviors and interpersonal relationships. The lessons of Home, Homeland, Hometown, and School describe the perspectives that were brought to Oxford Hills during campus entry on experiences are described in the following Chapter.

## CHAPTER 4

### "LIVING AND LEARNING" AT OXFORD HILLS

#### Introduction

The past-present narrative continues in this Chapter, specifically introducing the on-campus student experiences into this discussion of student community discourse. Creative writings, using poetry and drama performance, were unique resources that contributed to the interpretation of campus life as "living and learning" in this academic residential community.

*Dear Mom and Dad* was a poem representing letters to home describing some of the conflicts experienced during transitions between College and Home (Campus Presentation, 2001). Originally written for a campus performance, the poem used counterpoint voices to present "a piece in contradictions, to provoke by raising specific issues while maintaining neutrality and remaining relatively abstract."<sup>91</sup> The introductory prologue of *Dear Mom and Dad* suggests a parallel between the Oxford Hills experience and *gam saan haak*, the migration experiences of Chinese Americans in the 1800s.

Other original creative pieces, *I Want to Dance* and *I See Your Face*, are introduced in this Chapter. *I Want to Dance* is a poem which describes the pressures

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<sup>91</sup> The first scene began as students were introduced to the stage carrying baggage and other items that suggested their arrival on campus as freshmen. Illuminated by a single spotlight, each student was interrogated by a disembodied off-stage voice that asked for college identification information including "Nationality?" "Place of origin?" "Expected graduation?" After answering, each was handed a green card. Designed to resemble the immigration experience entering America on Angel and Ellis Islands, it was performed on campus to heighten the campus awareness towards the immigration experience and establish symbolic parallels between college and immigration as both consisting of bicultural navigational experiences. ("Dear Mom and Dad" Play Manuscript 2001)

during academic decision-making with the pursuit of individual interests that conflict with parental expectations (Lucas, 1996, p. 56). *I See Your Face* is a drama performance describing issues of Asian American identity through the emergence of racial cognizance that eventually changes interpersonal relationships and social scenes.

The voices of institutional representatives are interwoven throughout this Chapter to provide contextual details relevant to the particular student perspective. The institutional perspective is primarily presented through convocational messages of the College President. Other institutional perspectives are represented through voices of the faculty and college committee reports.

This chapter begins with dissonance and transitional experiences that are not limited to campus entry during freshman year. The themes of transition, academic , and ethno-racial identity provide an interpretive framework for understanding college life through shared Asian American experiences. Because of the nexus between perspective and context, the institutional *bricolage* and contextual setting must be also be considered with this Chapter.<sup>92</sup>

The discourse begins with the President's Convocation remarks that greet members of the campus community back to a new year in this "academic residential community." His annual Convocation welcome was intended to communicate yearly institutional priorities and introduce its newest members to a distinctive "living and learning" lifestyle of this residential academic campus community.

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<sup>92</sup> See Introduction and Chapter 1 for discussions of the institutional setting and of perspectives in the campus community-at-large.

Here community means welcoming and belonging, it means including and supporting, it means friendship, rather than mere acquaintance. You will likely never again live and work in such a close residential community with people who are different than you and who have so much to offer-- just as you have so much to offer. I call on you to cross boundaries, to learn about classmates and friends who are not like you, and to learn about you in the process. This is surely what education is about. (College President, Convocation 1999)

With these words, the President welcomed new and familiar faces into the campus community. The freshmen adjourned in anxious excitement of the next four years to come. This letter from *Dear Mom and Dad* begins the fictional conversation between student and Home that serves to signal student arrival onto the campus community.

Dear Mom and Dad: I just got back from the camping orientation trip. I had so much fun. I wish you could see this place; it's really beautiful here and the people.

#### Dissonance and College Transition

These students began their college exploration in earnest after listening to the college's message that entrusted them with "obligation" to perpetuate old traditions but to also learn from those who are different from themselves. The President's messages set the tone for campus entry and transitional experiences that appeared to be reflected throughout the community discourses.

Dear Mom and Dad: It's orientation week here at [Oxford Hills] and things are a blur. It's weird because so many people went on the camping trip, I feel a little awkward because I didn't. But I'm really excited though because I just met some people who want to take me camping. I've always wanted to. . . (Play Manuscript, 2001)

This particular letter alluded to the continuing influence of Home through mixed feelings of dissonance beginning with college entry.

This narrative discussion begins with the voice of Nicholas, a Chinese American and fine arts major, who described his conflicts with the family values of Home in a poem. *I Want to Dance* was a poem written about his college experiences and read in a campus presentation.

Nicholas: I want to dance.

Parent: What????

Nicholas: Dance, I want to dance.

Parent: You want to become a doctor?

Nicholas: It's my life... It's what I love... Dance!... I want to dance!

Parent: A lawyer. You want to become a lawyer?

Nicholas: Listen.

Parent: A doctor?

Nicholas: Listen to me!!

Parent: That's silly...(Campus performance 2000)

Nicholas embodied the continued conflict between students and Home involving academic decision-making processes throughout college. He had discovered performing arts at Oxford Hills, eventually to choreograph his own dance routines in a popular hip-hop student dance group. *I Want to Dance* suggested strong connections between student and Home that continued to impact campus life as well. Nicholas voice provides an alternative perspective to popular images of Asian American student success stories.

Many students were like Laura, now a senior, who referred back to her memories of campus entry transition while foreshadowing transitions that were to occur during the next four years

It's so early now, when you are a freshman, there's going to be things you run into. The more you learn in your courses, the more you interact with other people, those things pop up and make you think about these issues. I don't know, I mean, it's just my experience. (Laura, Group Discussion, 1999)

Nate echoed Laura's words with his initial impressions. His account also spoke of freshmen change and difference.

Freshmen year, people are friendlier, happier, and more easily approachable. Personally, excited to meet new people, I remember having red-eyed conversations about absolutely nothing that would last until the sun would come up. Everyone I met had a fresh, young innocence about them that I didn't realize then, but really miss now. (Nate, Essay, 2000)

Nate seemed less optimistic than Laura about these changes. His voice seemed to raise some questions about campus climate that were also suggested by Paul, a new graduate student who described his previous West Coast undergraduate experience.

When I came here from Seattle, I had to adjust. Out on the West Coast, it was much more relaxing, easier to have my group of Chinese friends. I never really thought about it then, just hung out. We all spoke Chinese and cooked together. Here, it's different. Because it's such a small place, everything seemed to be forced. It's an effort to get together with other Asians, seems weird to exclude non-Asians, and then in the [Graduate School], you're expected to act in another certain way. (Paul, Group Discussion, 2000)

Paul's comments introduced the possibility that some of these expressed difficulties could not be entirely attributed to first-year transitions. While student adjustments are to be expected as part of the college transition, Paul's graduate experience suggested the possibility of an intangible campus culture as contributing to the issues described by these students.

Separation from family led to campus transitions marked by feelings of difference to suggest possible cultural differences between students and the College. This was one of the earliest themes that appeared reflected by messages communicated to students during Orientation and Convocation events. The next section describes students who described being forced to consider Asian American self-identity for the first time, beginning with campus entry.



### “Checking the Box”

Many of these students came from Hometown communities without considering self-identities as Asian Americans. Upon campus arrival, incoming students were introduced to the prospect of a new self-identity through campus surveys and being visually identified for possible recruitment and membership into campus Organizations. At Oxford Hills, student surveys were part of regular campus activities conducted to provide demographic statistics describing the student campus population. Students described these ongoing campus research activities as "checking the box" with references to accompanying realizations associated with self-identification during this process.

I remember being asked to identify my race on the freshman survey. I had to think about it for a while before answering it. Afterwards, I realized from some discussions with other people, that others had decided not to answer it at all. (Charles, Conversation Field Notes, 1999)

From the campus discussions, it was apparent that feelings of ambivalence and dissonance accompanied ethnic and racial self-identification experiences in the student community discourse.

### *Hapa*

*Hapa* is a non-pejorative word used in Asian American vernacular to describe multiracial Asian Americans (Yoshimi, 1997). Multiracial Asian American perspectives appeared with lesser frequency in comparison with the predominant mono-ethnic voices. Despite this fact, the few multiracial voices in this study articulated significant issues distinctive to their bifurcated identities.

Noime grew up in an acculturated household with biracial parents.<sup>93</sup> In her poem, she described her college experiences defined by a *hapa* identity.

*Hapa* means...being a part of two different and wonderful cultures. I grew up watching my parents everyday seeing past racial boundaries, to the point where we don't even notice them. It means that I have been exposed to different ideas and customs my entire life. I didn't have to do much searching to find the white experience, nor the minority experience. I feel privileged to have had this opportunity. But the borderlands can be both enlightening and lonely. (Noime, Campus Presentation, 2000)

With her multiracial background, Noime described experiencing continual conflicts in "checking the box" during the completion of routine surveys collected during ongoing campus demographic research studies.

*Hapa* means that I DREAD and loathe the words, "Check one box ONLY" on a form. And then filling out the form becomes some form of political statement. All of a sudden, I am forced to choose which of my parents to whom I owe my identity. Being *hapa* means that when discussions arise about the majority, this group of amorphous white men, I have a face to that name. You're talking about my father. (Noime, Campus Presentation, 2000)

"Checking the box" was a commonplace experience of all students but for many Asian American students, it was a message that forced the reconsideration of individual identity. In comparison with high school years, the college life seemed to emphasize racial awareness with references found throughout the campus. There were few multiracial perspectives found during this study, but comments from Noime and Nick described campus transitions with adjustments to the racial landscape added to the level of dissonance described previously. Because of their bi-racial heritage, self-identification was a common part of Nick and Noime's campus life. Whether through introductions to a new friend or completing another survey, the *hapa* experience seemed to force multiracial students to self-identify by "choosing sides" between parents.

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<sup>93</sup> Noime had a Chinese American mother and Euro-American father.

Social messages pertaining to marriage were also found during casual conversations on campus. Noime described how one person, unaware of her multiracial background as a self-identified *hapa*, expressed views towards interracial marriages.

When I came to [Oxford Hills], in the first week I had an Asian student tell me, "I would never marry a white man. Because I don't want my children being mutts." Not knowing who she was talking to. (Noime, Campus Presentation, 2000)

Noime described encountering frequent social messages about multiracial Asian American relationships that were unintentional but still affected the everyday nature of her *hapa* experience on campus. These social messages from other Asian American Oxford Hills students appeared to reflect the predominant ethnic and racial perspectives from their past Home experiences. Mixed social messages concerning ethnicity and race suggested different perspectives and multiple forms of racial and ethnic self-identities that were particularly evident in multiracial experiences.

*Hapa* means being greeted with surprise when I tell someone I'm Asian. "You're ASIAN?!! NO! No really. Well, actually I see it a little in your face... maybe a little in your eyes...but I NEVER would have guessed that!" Or when it's finally acknowledged, hearing, "But you're not REALLY Asian." Everyday, I must choose to self identify. (Noime, Campus Presentation, 2000)

Noime's campus experiences as a multiracial Asian American with racially ambiguous features carried different assumptions but affirmed the close connection between the physical attributes of Asian-ness with Asian American identity. As an Asian American, she had to regularly explain her physical White features. Noime described how her own Asian American identity was questioned every time she introduced herself on campus.

During a campus cultural performance, Nick described what being an Asian American meant to him, a bifurcated experience of Black and Korean cultures marked by the historic confrontation in America's recent history as well

I'm Black and Korean... There's a need to write about why I choose not to choose sides that has developed in my life. (Nick, Campus Presentation, 2001)

Like Noime, Nick's multiracial perspective was different from the predominant mono-racial and mono-ethnic views expressed in the Oxford Hills community discourse. However unlike her, Nick responded to "checking the box" by choosing not to choose. His comments was brief but nevertheless seemed to suggest a profound ambivalence through efforts seeking greater understandings of his Asian American identity.

I've danced with angels and solved differential equations in three dimensions...I've developed ... which way is up. Whereas down to earth...I can't stop but wonder... I stand in the foreground, speaking of frames of reference and not one of them has described what it means to be an Asian. (Nick, Campus Presentation, 2001)

Nick's "learning and living" experience searched for a campus home to express is Korean American self. His narrative reflects the community discourse searching for "homes" on campus, comfort zones where Asian Americans could comfortably share common ethnic traditions and practices.

Sometimes when I'm happy being Korean, I speak with my mother...Other times, I sit eating kim chee alone in my dorm, so my roommates can't smell it. Under the covers, in the dark, I imagine myself with straight hair and a grandmother that could cook for me every night despite growing pessimistic desires of the universalist liking from my mother's womb. Lucky me. (Nick, Campus Presentation, 2001)

Nick's emotions spanned "happiness" as a Korean, "discomfort" eating *kim chee*, and unfulfilled desires for a family heritage that did not seem to be apparent in a single

community.<sup>94</sup> His dispassionate narrative reflected an ambiguous cultural self-identity in response to campus experiences that routinely asked him to “choose sides” in the recent events during *sa-i-ku p'ok-dong*.<sup>95</sup>

I wish I had a dollar for every time I was asked, “Whose side would I have taken in the Riots....” Those questions don’t move me anymore. There’s a need to write about why I choose not to choose sides that has developed in my life. (Nick, Campus Presentation, 2001)

His multiracial voice was a ponderation that illustrated the complexities of Asian American experiences. Unlike other students who found greater understandings of their cultural heritage through Asian American history courses, Nick seemed increasingly torn between his Korean and Black historical heritage. Multiracial perspectives often differed from the predominant viewpoints that were expressed on this campus. The tensions expressed in mono-ethnic or mono-racial perspectives became exacerbated by conflicting racial cultures. Like Noime in “*Checking the Box*,” Nick seemed bifurcated between his Korean- and Black-American identities. His Black-Korean self-identity remained unresolved during this study but still served to illustrate complexities of a heterogeneous Asian American population.

While it was important for some to “check the box,” it was also clear that a significant percentage were like Nick who chose not to choose. In the Common Data Set, the percentage of students whose race or ethnicity was unknown was greater than those

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<sup>94</sup> Eventually, students reported that Nick later “dropped out of the Asian scene.”

<sup>95</sup> *Sa-i-ku p'ok-dong* was a Korean phrase referring to the South Central Los Angeles conflagration ignited by the acquittals of five White policemen in the 1992 beating of Rodney King, a Black truck driver. In what eventually became known as the “first multiethnic riot in American history,” images of interracial violence became indelibly imprinted in history through extensive national media coverage. These events became a defining moment in contemporary Asian American history.

who identified as Asian American.<sup>96</sup> The significance of “not checking the box” remained but may be significant in affecting the accuracy of self-reporting demographic survey instruments.

Feelings of dissonance and uprootedness began during campus entry, stepping onto the Oxford Hills campus, persisting through continual reminders during routine campus activities to self-identify by “checking the box” as Asian Americans. Nick and Noime described being forced to choose between parents during everyday campus life. Multiracial Asian American experiences appeared less frequently yet still communicated profound significance. The multi-racial perspectives were important not only to describe the nature of conflicts associated with presuppositions of Asian-ness but also to illustrate an campus culture with an undercurrent of racial identity throughout the campus experience.

### Recruitment and Membership

The previous discussion described first year orientation experiences as a myriad of experiences to process. Campus activities associated with student organization recruitment added yet another layer of confusion to the transitional adjustments of campus life. Since the lifeblood of the student organizations were dependent on the efforts of its membership, orientation was always filled with its members promoting their campus organizations. Freshmen recruitment for the Asian American student organizations often occurred simply through visual contact or because of an identifying surname. Particularly for the first-year students, recruitment and membership into the

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<sup>96</sup> Common Data Set: Total Undergraduate Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity 1997-2000.

Asian American student organizations involved questions of ethnicity, race, and personal identity that were also not often considered during high school.

Tabitha, a South Asian American, described her first impressions as an Asian American student exposed to recruitment solicitations and introductory experiences that revealed tensions between ethnic group membership and racial identity. Her words described the meanings of race and identity that became attached to membership in pan-ethnic Asian American organizations as opposed to non-race based organizations.

Right now you are wondering why this is such a calamity. It doesn't seem like a hardship. It sounds as though all you have to do is choose to be in a given club or not. We all get dozens of emails from many clubs, so what's one more? You see, this is the crux of the issue, I'm not just talking about just another club. I'm talking about a cultural or ethnic organization, and accepting or rejecting it can be akin to accepting or rejecting your racial identity. Racial identity at [Oxford Hills] is a complex idea. Sometimes it comes down to is choosing between being essentially "raceless" or choosing to be actively diverse. (Tabitha, Essay, 2002)

The recruitment efforts, such as those associated with Asian- and Asian American groups, were critical to ensure the viability of the student organizations. Recruitment and emails seem commonplace in everyday life but Tabitha's narrative described how these solicitations added yet another layer of complexity to the considerations of first year transitions.

If you are a student from a "diverse" background, from the moment you enter this college, you are bombarded with emails and invitations from organizations representing your ethnicity. A typical freshman is overwhelmed by the transition to college; imagine also dealing with this issue. On one hand you can choose to become a member of the organization and actively identify yourself as Asian American, or whatever. On the other hand, you can choose not to participate and remain somewhat "outside" the ethnic circle. (Tabitha, Essay, 2002)

Zoe was a third generation Chinese American who arrived disengaged from the Asian American community as a self-described "minority within a minority."

The first Asian Americans I met were in the Chinese Dance Group. I danced a Dance Group in high school. Here, dancing became my connection to Asian Americans. I really looked up to those girls. They were my first role models here at [Oxford Hills]. Those girls really inspired me to get more involved with the Asian American organizations. I became the Chair for the Annual cultural presentation and directed the Dance Group. (Zoe, Campus Presentation, 2001)

Despite her initial feelings of dissimilarity from the other Asian American students on campus, Zoe eventually formed friendships through the shared interests of Chinese dancing. Her ethnic experiences provided her with the social support and confidence to become involved with and mentor Asian American students.

Later that year, a couple of freshmen and a junior came over to my apartment. None of us really knew each other; it was just a funky comedy dance we had to do for an Asian American semi-formal. We just watched dance videos and funk in action. After that, we became pretty tight. Later on in the year, one of those freshmen said that, at a Board Meeting, one of the reasons she became involved in the Asian American organization was because of that day. And it was at that moment that I realized I was no longer a freshman looking at upperclassmen, but it was my turn to start passing along some of the excitement that I had from Culture Night. Those two freshmen went on to become presidents of the Asian American organization. (Zoe, Campus Presentation, 2001)

Difficulties are to be expected during campus entry and college transitions, perhaps even more on rural residential campuses such as Oxford Hills College. These Asian American students arrived on campus with familiar memories of Home shaping their ethnocentric perspectives. The strength of the attachment to the family community was illustrated by a continual quest to find places on campus comfort places to share comforts similar to their Home communities. Students who found common interests in student organizations described new friendships.



## Academic Experiences

Learning is more than a formal academic process. It is also a social cultural journey of discovery, as you learn to cross boundaries, defined by race, gender, religion, place of origin, sexual orientation or identification, and political philosophy. [Oxford Hills] is a community and as a community we are strengthened immeasurably by our historical commitment to bring more than a transient neighborhood (College President, Convocation, 1999)

The commitment towards academic and intellectual growth was communicated through campus events such as Convocation and first year advising sessions. This section records the experiences of students who were encouraged to engage in individual self-discoveries and socio-cultural explorations as part of their “living and learning” experiences.

While “intellectual” classroom discussion will not eliminate tension or create a common view of the world we live in, there is no better place for such an examination of issues to occur than the classroom; it is in this setting that ideas can be discussed from a variety of perspectives...with ideally, less emotionalism and under the trained eye of a faculty member. (Diversity Committee Report #1, 1990-1995, p. 22)

In a liberal arts tradition, the curriculum is broadly based in classical disciplines intended as “tools” for the habits of mind after graduating. The curriculum plays a defining role in the education of the Oxford Hills student.

First, because Oxford Hills is an academic institution, its core mission should be informed by the institutional commitment to all quarters of American society. Second, whatever their nature, extracurricular initiatives related to issues of difference only advance the conversation or community understanding so far. It is in the structured framework of the classroom that these issues can most substantially be considered – whether it is in response to an article or book that all participants have read, or as part of a reasoned discussion lead by a scholar who brings both academic expertise and pedagogical experience to bear on the discussion. (Diversity Committee Report #1, 1990-1995, p. 28)

The importance of the curriculum to the “learning and living” model of experiential education was renowned as part of the Oxford Hills experience. In response

to an increasing interest in Asian American perspectives on campus often described with cultural disconnects to family ethnic cultures, students turned to the curriculum to begin an intellectual quest examining pan-ethnic Asian immigrant cultures. In doing so, they found that the existing Asian foreign studies courses did not include their own American perspectives as ethnic Asians.

### Ping

The initiative to add an Asian American cultural studies program to the curriculum stimulated discussions and revealed differing attitudes and philosophies towards race, identity, and education among the students on campus. Ping appeared words appeared in a series of newspaper editorials as part of the ongoing campus discourse for Asian American curriculum needs. He emphasized the philosophical ideals of liberal education in his arguments against Asian American ethnic studies programs.

Students are here to get a liberal education. Liberal...has a lot to do with freeing the mind from the political and ideological biases that saturate the world. The ability to think disinterestedly is supposed to give one an advantage in life. (Ping, Essay #1, 2002)

Although Ping's position did not appear to be supported by others in this student community, his attitude seemed share some similarities with faculty and administration perspectives.<sup>97</sup> Ping wrote many published letters and articles and frequently participated in organized campus discussions in opposition to an Asian American Studies curriculum initiative that other Asian American students proposed to the faculty. The initiative was one of the primary initiatives under discussion at the time of this study. He was also opposed to the general nature of interdisciplinary inquiry associated in cultural studies curriculum.

Discussions, publications, and cultural events all "facilitate an awareness of Asian American issues" without forcing the people involved to engage in rigorous academic study, as all programs of study should be. ... The classroom is not the place for such thinking. (Ping, Essay #1, 2002)

Ping described ideals of liberal education through "rigorous and disinterested" learning as a counterargument to Asian American curriculum proposals even though there were only two Asian American courses available at the time.

I have my doubts about ethnic studies programs in general. Please note that I am not opposed to the idea of courses devoted to the study of ethnicity. But to have an entire major dedicated to exploring the issues and concerns of one ethnic group seems to me, well, parochial and antithetical to the idea of a university (or college). (Ping, Essay #1, 2002)

Ping questioned the validity of cultural study programs devoted to Asian American and ethnic identity studies. He also seemed to oppose interdisciplinary curriculum approaches.

I also question the value of "interdisciplinary study" that ethnic studies purport to offer. The practical difficulties involved in yoking together two separate disciplines tend to far outweigh the benefits that may accrue as a result of this effort; read some of the reviews of College Course classes... Once you start, where do you stop? (Ping, Essay #1, 2002)

Ping's questions addressed the pragmatics of resource allocation for a body of students who appeared with both pan-ethnic and ethnic needs. Regarding the proposed Asian American curriculum initiatives, Ping responded with a suggestion to substitute "the great wealth of Chinese history and culture and Asian American curriculum programs. His comments illustrated a commonly held belief on campus that conflated ethnic with racial identity while discussing issues of these Asian American students."<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Refer to the *bricolage* of faculty and administration perspectives found in Chapter 2.

<sup>98</sup> Discussions on campus initiatives for curriculum changes often reflected conflated beliefs of Asian American identity that seemed to substitute ethnicity for racial identity.

Contrary to Ping's position, there was a growing consensus in support of an Asian American Studies and Korean language program in response to the increasing campus presence of these groups. Other Asian American students also spoke of the need for curriculum change. These students described "trading souls with the Academe," four years of intellectual growth that eventually disenfranchised Asian Americans from their own families.

#### "Trading Souls" with the Academe

Many students on campus did not appear to know about Asian diasporic immigration in American history. Students were beginning to search for themselves situated in the academic community through relevant courses such as Asian American history.<sup>99</sup> Laura, a 1.5 generation Korean American, was beginning to wonder where she really fit in.

And I think that's one of those things. I grew up in a high school where it was very white, being Asian American or Korean there, I was thinking that I rarely thought about it until I came here. And when we started going into different things, learning about different things and interacting with different people, one of the running jokes on the editorial board is that I'm like this all-encompassing person. They're like, "Oh you make up this all encompassing diversity because it's a very white male directorate...you're like an ethnic minority, a woman, and a non-Greek, all rolled into one." (Laura, Group Discussion, 1999)

Laura's description was commonly expressed in minority experiences participating in general campus activities. She sensed her non-minority peers viewed her as a symbolic representative of minority experience. That realization eventually led her to express feelings of "difference."

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<sup>99</sup> Almost all respondents had reported taking the Asian American history courses at Oxford Hills.

The more you learn about your own history and your sense of place in the United States, one of the things that really helped me identify myself as being an Asian American, Korean American, and being a woman here...is by taking classes and recognizing the fact that my ancestors, the people who have come here before me, and my family here, myself I am an American, and that I have a place in this country. When people ask me, "Why do I have to study immigration in U.S. History?" I tell them, "Why do I have to learn about the Civil War and Revolutionary Wars?" Immigration History is as much a part of U.S. History as the Civil and Revolutionary Wars." (Laura, Group Discussion, 1999)

Laura's words spoke of the importance of proposed curriculum changes for the entire college community. Proposals relating to Asian American courses triggered many campus discussions that revealed differing identity beliefs on the campus.

Asian American history courses were pivotal experiences for most of these students. These discussions led to a changed perspective from one that did not view race as culturally significant to an emergent viewpoint of racial cognizance. As a junior, Laura reflected on her self-perceptions that had changed during the past three years.

You're like an ethnic minority, a woman, and a non-Greek, all rolled into one. It's funny because I think of myself as being part of that theme, like a contributing member of the [Oxford Hills] community and yet when those little things are singled out, I think, "Oh my goodness, I really am different, and I'm not really considered to be fully American and fully integrated into [Oxford Hills]." (Laura, Group Discussion, 1999)

Laura's earlier comments foreshadowed her changed viewpoint as a senior. Similar perspective changes were echoed by others who sought to locate themselves within existing cross cultural programs. Elaine and Jessica sought to understand themselves by studying cultural identity. Eventually both became active student leaders in this community, directing their efforts towards curriculum changes and administrative support to meet the needs of the Asian American community.

To come to [Oxford Hills] and see that your history isn't represented is somewhat disconcerting from a personal perspective...I majored in Spanish because of the parallels; it deals with race, gender, and cross-cultural relations. (Elaine, Essay, 2002)

From her educational experience, Elaine was able to witness the benefits provided by cultural studies curriculum and minority counseling within her major of Latina/o American Studies. She became acutely aware of the contrast with Asian American campus experiences that lacked curriculum, advising, and administrative support. She eventually co-founded a campus newspaper dedicated to Asian American issues.

Jessica was also committed to the community and attributed some of her self-confidence to her experiences learned from her major in African-American cultural studies.

Being an African-Am major arms me with a language to work ourselves academically, Asian Americans are surprisingly absent from this discussion. Why do we as Asians have to address identity as part of the extracurricular?" (Jessica, Group Discussion, 1999)

Jessica's comments underscored the need for Asian American Studies curricula that could guide students while examining issues pertaining to cultural identity. Despite her dual Philosophy and African American Studies major, Jessica found that the insights from her academic experiences could not be shared with her family.

In many ways, I feel as though I've traded my soul for the 'success' that others covet... Whenever I go back home on breaks...I slide back into familial relationships and my native tongue with the ease of a child recovering toys from her childhood...I find myself "thinking" in English and struggling to find the appropriate words to translate into Korean. Often, nonsense results. (Jessica, Essay, 1999)

Jessica described a progressive disconnect from her familial culture that accompanied her four years of intellectual growth at Oxford Hills.

I could easily articulate Hegel's theory of the dialectic, but I have trouble communicating to my grandmother, my second mother from birth, what educational opportunity has meant in my life and why it's so important to me to dedicate my life to make sure others have the same opportunity. Only then am I acutely aware of loss – the loss of fluency of thought in the language of home for the language of academic "success." (Jessica, Essay, 1999)

Although knowledge change and intellectual transformation is an expected result of education, Jessica's voice suggested an educational experience that diminished her ethnic self and, in doing so, relinquished a connection to her cultural heritage. For Jessica, the Oxford Hills education consisted of learning separated from living. She spoke to an educational cultural conundrum that was thematic in the discourses of many voices on campus. As these students pursued their education, they became increasingly disconnected from the very cultures they were representing, the very communities they were expected to return to as leaders.

At a discussion group convened to discuss the support Asian American students needed on campus, a suggestion for a dedicated advisor with a familiarity of Asian American cultural issues emerged. One senior described how his original skepticism of minority advising services became transformed through conversations with the Latina/o American counselor on campus.

I said to myself, "I've been here for four years and what I did, I went by the Office of Latino Advising and I asked, "What do you do? How do you think the students benefit from you? And why?" And he convinced me within a minute why we should have a similar position. (Josh, Group Discussion, 1999)

Instead the Oxford Hills experience of "learning and living" within an "academic residential community," these narratives portrayed a different educational experience. These students arrived on campus with their perspectives based on past Home and Homeland experiences, significantly influenced by family and ethnic cultures. These

experiences echoed the socio-cultural themes of ethnic Diasporic and ethnic American-born perspectives and socio-cultural linguistic schisms from the previous chapter.

Ping's perspective first appeared as a response to the student discussions proposing an Asian American Studies initiative in response to the increasing interest in this community. His background and viewpoints appear consistent with an ethnic Diasporic perspective. His counterpoint views appeared to be singular in nature during the discourse, but his voice was loud and persistent. Throughout the campus community, his frequent editorials were arguments based on liberal arts philosophy that also appeared consistent with the college's expressed educational position.

The narratives from this community discourse suggest Asian American college experiences through meanings of student-family separation, with "separation" redefined according to personal history and family heritage. Instead of a maturation experience, college seemed more a reflection of an orphanage experience, in the sense of a permanent "loss" of identity, disconnect from family culture and ancestral heritage. To many, intellectual growth and discovery during college was accompanied by increasing separation from ancestral heritage and family history. These experiences were also associated with dissonant emotions, increasing questions of "authentic" ethnic identities and searches for ancestral heritage through shared family stories.

Their narratives spoke to the nature of the psychological and emotional connections between Home and student that continued to exert an influence on college through academic issues. The "living and learning" education found in Jessica's experience described an exchange of Korean cultural heritage for academic knowledge that separated the "learning" from the "living." Her Oxford Hills experience of liberal



education, academic fellowship, and loftier concepts of critical thinking and dialectical reasoning was accompanied by a diminished understanding of her Korean heritage and family elders. Her living experiences became increasingly unfamiliar during college with a progressive deterioration of Korean fluency and an acute sense of “*loss*.”

The emergent narrative texts from the academic discourses were specific to separate curriculum change initiatives to address the increasing needs of the Korean American and Asian American communities on campus. The historical perspectives of institutional action and student perspective of Ping suggested that the current geographic definition of cultural identity and misperceptions associated with assumptions of “success” could partially account for the institutional recalcitrance in addressing the needs of Asian American students. These voices indicated existing different perceptions of Asian American identity that often conflated ethnicity and race.

Learning about Asian American cultural identity existed through student generated efforts and activities in the extra-curriculum. These student narratives spoke to the need for curriculum changes initiatives to address issues specific to Asian American perspective, cultural identity, and academic issues that appeared to affect the everyday existence of these students on campus. Their voices suggested that the additions of Korean language and Asian American cultural studies, as academic approaches towards facilitating cultural understandings and bridging socio-linguistic divergences, could have significant positive impact on post-graduation experiences.

Understanding diaspora and immigration was not only relevant for Asian American students but was important for all to understand a society based on cultures across both the Atlantic and Pacific. This was the reasoning for the student government

resolution in support of proposed Asian American curriculum initiatives. The intense interest generated by activities from the pan-ethnic community discourse suggests a greater potential for cross-cultural dialogues in higher education where multiple cultures converged frequently for the first time. Despite the apparent student optimism, there also seemed to exist a continual underlying tension between expressed academic needs and this student community without a private space to share common experiences and interests.

### Ethno-Racial Experiences

Past experiences suggested that students arrived on campus with dominant perspectives reflecting an ethnic self-identity. Fears of assimilation and the natural inclination to protect cultural identities were counterpoint arguments to educational lessons marked by individual exploration and growth associated with crossing boundaries.

Sometimes, if you don't hold on to your cultural identity, you are in great danger of being engulfed and assimilated in the majority. That, in itself, is not a problem. I have no grief with that. If, however, assimilation means that somehow you lose your own uniqueness, then there is something terribly wrong. (Tabitha, Essay, 2002)

The narrative voices reflected the differences of Asian American perspectives but all showed a shift in perspective from an ethnic diasporic to an American pan-ethnic perspective, often associated with an emergent racial awareness.

Dear Mom and Dad: I'm starting to make more friends. But one thing that's a little uncomfortable is how non-diverse it feels. There were so many more people who LOOKED like me back home. (Campus Performance, 2001)

With encouraging messages from the President, these students began their academic explorations into the meanings of collective pan-ethnic Asian perspectives that

were part of American experiences. The narratives of the newfound Asian American communities appeared to represent campus pilgrimage experiences to locate cultural communities and campus homes for their newfound Asian American *han* perspective.

Many students described feeling initially uncomfortable with the increased presence of Asian Americans compared to their previous Hometown experiences. Some gradually overcame feelings of initial awkwardness. Other students, like Janice, described becoming increasingly self-conscious of perceptions towards their own Asian American identity and deliberately avoided any interaction with other Asian American students.

Janice described deliberately avoiding relationships because of the awkwardness felt from her newfound awareness of racial self-identity.

Then I came to college, and at first, I was a bit daunted by all of the Asians on campus. I know that [Oxford Hills] is relatively less racially diverse than many other colleges, but compared to where I'm from, this campus is very diverse. So at first, I didn't want to be "sucked in" to the Asian scene – I didn't want to be grouped by others only by my race. (Janice, Survey Response, 1999)

Feelings of heightened self-consciousness of oneself and social distancing from other Asian American students were frequently described in community discourse. Social associative identity formation describes the influences of the external group based perceptions of Asian American identity attached to Asian American interpersonal relationships and social scenes. This message was the basis of *I See Your Face*, an original drama written to describe such social experiences of Asian American students on campus.

“I See Your Face.” (Play Manuscript, 1999)

*I See Your Face* was the title of a play describing social categorization as a political ramification for visible minorities on campus based on community membership.<sup>100</sup> It was a dramatic portrayal of Asian American experiences being categorized by social scenes. The character of Steve spoke to the assumptions of “Asian-ness” that affected decisions of friendship and group acceptance.

This production described how the awareness of externally imposed assumptions became manifested by group membership and friendship decisions that impacted the everyday nature of campus experiences. His words suggested the development of racial cognition accompanied by profound implications affecting self-perceptions and interpersonal social behaviors.

These creative voices described self-identities that varied from “authentic Asian-ness” to “Whiteness” that reflected external perceptions of group associated behaviors. Students similar to the Steve character appeared to socialize with mostly White friends and were suggested as “less authentic.”

In contrast, Dorothy and Anne were involved in social scenes that included many Asian American friendships. Dorothy rejected the possibility of dating Steve based on her assumptions taken from observations of his friendships on campus.

Dorothy: We’d never be able to get along; people like him don’t want to involve themselves with the Asian Clique.

Anne: Why are you assuming so much?

Dorothy: OK, maybe I don’t, but that doesn’t change the fact that we have totally different crowds. He’s probably one of those guys who feels weird when he’s surrounded by Asians, looking all around to see if anyone notices. (“I See Your Face” Play Manuscript, 1999)

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<sup>100</sup> See “Recruitment and Membership” in the introductory campus experiences described in Chapter 3.

These passages exemplified the difficulties described by Asian American students that impacted interpersonal relationships and social behaviors during college. Steve's monologue addressed the crux of such social associative categorizing. Using rhetorical questions and sarcastic criticism, he examined Dorothy's assumptions of group membership and "Asian-ness" that influenced her dating selections.

Steve: I saw her... and made assumptions. What is wrong with this picture? We're just putting names to faces. "Hi my name is Steve, I don't hangout with Asians so I guess I'm a twinkie." "Hi, my name is Dorothy, are you Asian too? No, oh that's too bad. ("I See Your Face" Play Manuscript, 1999)

Although this was a creative drama, the words described identities of "Asian-ness" or "Twinkie-ness" imposed by the external social community. Instead of being considered by his common interests such as a shared appreciation of ethnic cultures, Steve found himself "*not Asian enough*" and excluded from Dorothy's social scenes by virtue of the public scrutiny of his social interactions with other visible racial groups.

Steve: What the hell is going on? Why can't I be President of the Asian Students' Association and have mostly white friends? Why can't my best friend be black and my crowd be Asian? When I see a table of Asians when I walk into the Food Court, should I feel urged to join them because they're my peers? Or should I be repelled by them because they're so GODDAMN conspicuous?... *I see your face. I see your friends. So I think I see you.* ("I See Your Face" Play Manuscript, 1999; emphasis added)

This play reflected parallel messages and dissonant emotions from the individual narratives and community discourse. *I See Your Face* references the social associative identity formation that emerged from the following experiences to reveal ethnic and racial differences in identity perspectives of Asian American campus experiences.

Emergent racial perspectives were often unanticipated and accompanied by self-discoveries. Nadia was a South Asian American who did not participate in Asian

American communities. Her racial “epiphany” came from a seemingly casual conversation with a dormitory hallmate.

I attended some meetings, although I never became highly active. I didn't really recognize any of this as a problem until a girl on my hall told me, "You know what I just realized? You're not white! I never thought of that before. You just seem so white." (Nadia, Campus Newspaper, 2002)

For Nadia, this freshman experience marked the beginning of a painful awareness of herself seen on campus as a visible minority representative.

On one hand, you can choose to become a member of the organization and actively identify yourself as Asian American or whatever. On the other hand, you can choose not to participate and remain somewhat "outside" that ethnic circle. (Nadia, Campus Newspaper, 2002)

As an “outsider” to the Asian American community, Nadia's essay explicitly described group-based assumptions from membership decisions made as freshmen.

I am Indian. This didn't trouble me so much as puzzled me and I began to wonder what it was that made her feel that way. What did I do that made me "seem white?" Was it because I didn't hang out exclusively with Indian people or because I didn't exhibit all the mores associated with Indians? That didn't make any sense and yet, maybe that was all the reason she needed to pigeon-hole me. (Nadia, Campus Newspaper, 2002)

Nadia described how membership in Asian American student organizations seemed to affect perceptions of her identity as either “Indian” or “white” on campus.

As a student, if I choose not to be in any diversity clubs, then I am automatically not seen as a willing member of my community. I may be accused of acting "white," or of rejecting my roots. On the other hand, if I choose to become a member of these clubs, then I am stereotyped as someone who exclusively associates with people of similar backgrounds. (Nadia, Campus Newspaper, 2002)

### Cliques

In response to intellectual challenges for critical self-examination, introspective comparisons began to reveal differences in self-identity construals between social

communities of past and present experiences. Repeated concerns of "self-segregation" were beginning to suggest issues relating to racial identity.

As a self-described "twinkie," Karen expressed some discomfort during her introductory experiences to the Oxford Hills community. Her initial feelings were replaced by a growing realization that her impressions were influenced by public perceptions and her sensitivity towards assumptions of "Asian-ness." She described how her racial awareness had heightened her sensitivity to self-perceptions and influenced her initial uneasiness with other students in this community.

For a period of time, I found myself reluctant to bring up without being asked what kinds of activities I was involved in for fear of sounding too "narrow" and offending others with what might seem like a preoccupation with race, feeling overly conscious every time I appeared at a dining hall amidst a circle of Asian faces that I was contributing to the "clique" mystique. (Karen, Essay, 1998)

Her words suggested how public assumptions of group behaviors and criticisms of "cliques" and "self-segregation" stifled the social interactions of Asian American students. This reaction was found in many discourses and accompanied by mixed ramifications on social behaviors.

A group of Asians, or any minority group for that matter, sitting together is deemed cliquish and self-segregating. It may be a natural feeling, for I know I have felt it at times, the unease in being around a large group of people who seem to be bonded by facts out of my control. But what is deemed as segregating and alienating may depend on the observer himself. The actual event in and of itself becomes meaningful through the observer's own judgment... I soon realized, however, that my crime lay not in pursuing Asian interests and associating with Asian people who share those interests, but in feeling ashamed about it, for failing to discuss how and why my sense of Asianness was a central component of my intellectual and social growth. (Karen, Essay, 1998)

Karen's words echoed a campus climate of heightened scrutiny towards visible minority activities. This scrutiny stifled the social interactions of Asian American students in the central dining hall, an area that was designed to foster social interactions

on campus. It was only after this realization that Karen began to feel comfortable enough to participate in Korean American activities and learn more about her own family's Korean traditions.

Growing up in a predominantly Caucasian neighborhood, I rarely interacted with racial minorities, especially Koreans or Korean-Americans. Since I grew up associating with "white" people, I always thought of myself as a typical Twinkie, yellow on the outside, and white on the inside. (Jennifer, Essay, 2000)

Although usually pejorative, Jennifer's usage did not appear to find fault in using it to describe herself and suggesting an assimilatory previous experience in a homogeneous "White" Hometown experience.

Arthur was active in this community as a board member in various student organizations and co-author of "*I See Your Face*." He summarized his campus experiences with a diverse Asian American student community that appeared to be divided by the racial experiences from previous Hometown experiences.

You have two basic responses here. First you have the students who come from predominantly white high schools who come here and think that there are a lot of Asians here. Then there are those who come from areas that are heavily Asian. They come and wonder, "Where are the Asians?" (Arthur, Interview, 2000)

The student narratives described a multitude of responses describing profound effect of racial cognizance that affected interpersonal interactions and group relationships throughout college. "*I See Your Face*" social experiences influenced the formation of newfound racial lenses. As a result, some Oxford Hills students responded by forming closer friendships and developing a spirit of sodality and activism in their respective communities while others avoided these same communities.

The cultural diversity of Hometown experiences appeared to be a significant factor in adjusting to the development of racial self-consciousness occurring in college.



Students from multiracial, heterogeneous communities arrived on campus comfortable with co-Asian associations and sometimes felt that the number of students on campus was inadequate to represent the cultural diversity of Asian Americans.

The collective emergent voice suggested greater internal conflicts with students who grew up in homogeneous predominant White communities similar in composition to the Oxford Hills campus. This seemed to be counterintuitive to common logic that suggests a smoother college transition when a home community is more similar to the new college environment. This can, however, be accounted by the differential considerations of race and identity between the past Home and present campus experiences. In addition, these narratives suggested internalized cultural beliefs associated with growing up as a visible minority in Hometown experiences without Asian American peers or role models. Dissonance from ethnic and racial assumptions formed from previous homogeneous experiences emerged during increased interactions with other Asian Americans on campus.

The differences between the past Home and college experiences suggest that meanings of “like” and “difference” may be influenced by different cultural pasts. Assumptions of racial “likeness” in heterogeneous Asian American groups may, in fact, overlook cultural dissimilarities that exist as socio-cultural schisms. These schisms may become impediments to interpersonal relationships that are assumed with “like” individuals. These contrasting interpretations of racial likeness and cultural dissimilarity can thus influence the considerations of knowledge growth and intellectual learning through the disparate assumptions associated with Asian American experiences.

In addition, narrative voices also suggested a tension that developed over the four years at Oxford Hills. Entering students seemed to arrive with Home experiences creating an ethnocentric perspective attached to negative self-image. Over time, some students seemed to increasingly question their “Asian” self-images. This introspection often led to racial discourse such as *I See Your Face* and *Dear Mom and Dad* and the realization of a newfound Asian American identity.

### Separation and Difference

In some respects, these college experiences were similar to acculturation during *gam saan haak*. Campus entry was marked by orientation and Convocation events as Asian American students converged from vastly different Home and family background experiences. Commonalities from past recollections began to suggest that many were forming new acquaintances with Asian American peers for the first time.

Themes also described the significant influence of family culture on the lives of these students and Asian American self-identity. The search for Home began with campus entry that many described as “the first time they were physically separated from their family for an extended period of time” (Campus Newspaper, 2001, p. 22). They entered this campus bearing family dreams of academic success. Four years later, these students emerged understanding an Asian American *han* accompanied by realizations of difference.

To find the physical location, a sense of community, and the feeling of “being home” is the lifelong struggle of Asian American individuals and the recurrent challenge for Asian American communities. (Yonsei, Campus Newspaper, 2001)

These voices suggested a new form of separation marked not only by physical distance but also with ever-widening socio-cultural differences from the very families

they had been expected to rejoin after college. These divergences appeared to increase as students progressed through the liberal arts curriculum.

One of the most profound experiences described by Asian American students was the development of racial awareness and identity as a person of color. This would mean understanding that identity was not only based on ethnicity but also included external perceptions attached to physical characteristics.

Experiences describing "difference" appeared to emerge simultaneously with a developing awareness of Asian American identity, particularly with students from homogeneous predominantly White Hometown cultures. "Difference" appeared through dissonance and transition, preceding epiphanies that marked personal transformation of self-identity.

Narratives described transitional experiences, with emphasis in first-year activities. This transition and associated feelings of dissonance were not just limited to the freshmen, but were also found in older students. Dissonance found in this study showed expressed emotions that ranged from the positive sense of exhilaration to the negative as malaise, anxiety, fear, and depression in adjusting to the campus racial climate. Cognitive dissonance associated with crossing cultural boundaries varied depended on the degree of contrast between the cultures of Home and college.

These students described their experiences that lead to the realization of a newfound Asian American identity. Asian American identity had not been a voluntary choice but became imposed through routine campus activities such as "checking the box" and certain student organization memberships. Self-discoveries were fostered through social interactions from this community that were external to the curriculum. In essence,

“living and learning” at Oxford Hills College had become completely bifurcated from learning experiences as Asian Americans.

As the Asian American community pursued their collective pan-ethnic interests and shared discourses, their increasing visibility was partially due to the lack of academic or residential spaces for community activities. Scheduling organized meetings and social activities in public spaces may have resulted in increased exposure to heightened public scrutiny and created a false semblance of exclusive group behaviors.

Attitudes concerning self-segregation impacted the expressed attitudes and behaviors found in this community. Many students felt compelled to defend their behaviors against the appearance of separatist actions. This defensiveness also appeared to inhibit their self-expression. Except for the specific voices described here, explicit criticisms of separatism were not readily apparent in public commentary but this circumstance seemed indicated by the perpetual defensive tones in these narratives.

Dealing with racial, ethnic, and religious stereotypes may be one the most pressing challenges of your generation, and there is no better place or time than here and now for you to begin creating the future that you would like to see.... Here we have a opportunity to come together as a community and to begin to engage in a critical, respectful examination of our assumptions about race. (College President, Convocation, 2002)

The prevalence of self-segregation criticisms and ambivalent public perceptions of community behaviors illustrated the continued conflicts between actual community endeavors and public perceptions. While comparisons of campus activities and public visibility of Asian American students warrant further studies within this specific institutional setting, the President’s words suggest that some of the concerns with separatism may also depend on the perspective of the viewer.

I was disappointed last year to learn the results of a study, conducted here as a senior thesis that revealed that most white students surveyed did not acknowledge that they belonged to a race. They did not recognize whiteness as culturally meaningful.... The manifestation of one assumption is all too familiar — the inquiry on the part of some whites of why black students or Asian students or Latino students or Native students — students whose identity is racialized — hang out together. We rarely ask why less superficially identifiable groups — Catholic students, Jewish students, lacrosse teammates, a group of women or men, white students — hang out together. (College President, Convocation, 2002)

The socio-cultural themes of this Chapter represented *past-present* interpretations from the student community discourse. These students revealed self-identities that ranged from an ethnocentric racelessness to conflicted racial identities influenced by family and American society. Most of the voices in this chapter seemed to remain unresolved in contrast with those in the following individual narratives based on *past-present-future* interpretations.

I'm a junior here and when I first came here, it was like I was being torn apart trying to . . . feeling like I had to choose one or the other and I don't feel like any of us should have to. Like when we talk about bicultural things like learning about that, should include more than learning about just two cultures, but should include learning about all of them . . . I don't know. (Noime, Group Discussion, 1999)

## CHAPTER 5

### INDIVIDUAL STUDENT NARRATIVES OF PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE

#### The Voices of Past, Present, Future

This Chapter includes personal narratives of college experience through the individual perspectives of Gavin, Sarah, Kim, Bruce, and Erik. Each voice articulated their private emotions, providing details that added psychological dimensions to an Asian American perspective. These narratives attached profound significance to their college experiences through individual perspective transformations and realizations of self-identity.

Gavin, Sarah, Kim, Bruce, and Erik used introspective narrative to re-visit their past Home, Homeland, Hometown, and School experiences. Each student compared past/present experience suggesting identities interpreted in future context. Their stories contrasted Youth/College Perspectives to illustrate profound changes of individual and social circumstances during their Oxford Hills education.

Echoing Gavin's words, these students "made sense" of their college experiences from changed perspectives of self-identity. These voices carried personal messages that were individually distinctive. At the same time, each narrative spoke to aspects of the previously described collective themes that explored the cultural meanings of Asian American experience at Oxford Hills College.

## Gavin

Gavin, was a second-generation Korean American born and raised in the Northwest Pacific. Both parents had emigrated from South Korea. However, his father returned to his native South Korea during Gavin's youth. Gavin's narrative reflected a turbulent parent-child relationship and conflicted expectations relating to diasporic Korean and American-born perspectives.

Gavin contributed to the Oxford Hills community through his creative endeavors. He produced his own film documentaries depicting ethnic Korean cultures and Asian American student experiences. He documented his own life journey as a journal narrative written during his college years.<sup>101</sup>

His public persona on campus appeared inconsistent with his private persona that grew increasingly negative and self-destructive during his four years of college. Gavin's narrative suggested an ambivalent self-identity that impacted his private, academic, and social worlds. Gavin's journal writing was his effort to "make sense" of a conflicted Korean American self-identity that affected everyday campus existence and reconcile his demons of past and present.

I'm trying to make sense of it all. I mean, I think I sort of understand my purpose, at least to some extent and I have an idea of what I should be up to, but I really think I should try to understand more of why I do the things I do.<sup>102</sup>

### "Making Sense of It All"

Gavin struggled to make sense of an early youth experience with conflicting Home, Homeland, and School cultures. His narratives reflect that, even as a five-year old,

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<sup>101</sup> Gavin's webjournal was found posted on the Internet after his graduation from Oxford Hills.

<sup>102</sup> All of Gavin's quotes in this chapter were taken from his Internet journal unless otherwise specified. His web entries were posted during years 2000-2002.

he was comfortable with his Kindergarten classmates but also conflicted by the differing Korean diasporic culture of his parents' Home perspectives.

Well, it's me...I don't really know how aware of my Korean heritage I was until I went to school as the language barrier slammed me in the face. Undeterred by my inability to speak English I went on to start to excel in school, learning everything on my own, since my parents weren't of much help. (Gavin, Webjournal, 2000)

Gavin's recollections suggested that the familiarity of his School environment came from his American-born perspective. Parent-child conflicts were common throughout Gavin's narrative. These conflicts can be partly attributed to socio-cultural linguistic differences between his parents' Korean and his American-born perspectives.

And their [Gavin's parents] ability to speak English is also highly limited, so although we're both able to listen to some degree to what each other say, it's nearly impossible to respond in any fashion outside of a very limited set of words. Because of this establishing a relationship with them in which we can share any sort of mutual dialogue is near impossible without one of us trying to attain some additional proficiency in the other language. And God knows I'm willing to learn, but the feeling isn't shared on the other side. (Gavin, Webjournal, 2000)

In his early years, Gavin described increasing frustration with language miscommunications in his Home. Occasionally he would make references to his father's exodus from Home.<sup>103</sup> His narrative suggested that, from his father's actions, Gavin's perceptions of "having to be the elder male figure in the house" represented another stressor, a sense of added responsibility.

Despite his expressed personal difficulties, Gavin's recollections of his secondary school experience focused positively on his success. However, during this time he also appeared to express an attitude that was contrary to a theme found in the community discourses.

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<sup>103</sup> Gavin's father returned to South Korea when Gavin was ten.



They may be proud of my "accomplishments" to some degree, but they rarely have any encouraging words to say to me without negatively impacting another family member. I just don't like this negativity and that my parents can't just accept their mistakes and move on. I think the hardest part to deal with is that they always project their problems and mistakes outside of themselves. I'm surprised that I'm the way I am, having grown up with my parents, but I guess I never really looked to them in any way outside of provider and they've never really tried to influence me besides the "ACHIEVE ACHIEVE ACHIEVE" mantra. (Gavin, Webjournal, 2001)

In his journal, Gavin's achievements seemed to be associated with negative personal feelings, different from the predominant voice of filial piety in the student community. Instead of attributing academic successes to parental sacrifices, Gavin appeared to attach feelings of increasing blame, resentment, and criticism to their parenting skills.

Gavin described his Youth in terms of personal turmoil and psychological conflicts rooted in socio-cultural linguistic difference. His early perspective was shaped by differences with the diasporic Korean viewpoints of his parents, his American-born perspective, and the separation of his parents as a child. While the roots of his psychological turmoil existed as early Home and Homeland difference, the emotional consequences of turmoil and angst did not become apparent until college.

#### "NO Me" Perspective and "A Naked Singularity"

Gavin arrived at Oxford Hills without a clear sense of his identity as an Asian American. His self-identity had been based on conflicting Korean ethnic and American-born cultures. "*There is no me,*" foreshadowed an impending identity crisis that would eventually jeopardize his entire college career and mental health.

That bothers me. It bothers me that my imagination is so overwhelming that I can sense things that I'm not capable of sensing. I can place myself in positions that I'm never capable of being in. And it bothers me that I cannot feel what others feel. I'm lost in this external input. There is no me. (Gavin, Webjournal, 2002)

Gavin's thoughts seemed to make reference to the formative nature of his past social interactions, "external input," on his existing "me." His comments suggested that his self-perceptions came from external sources, possibly the cultural assumptions placed on him as a Korean American from his past experience.

His journal reflected his continual struggle to articulate a deeply private world. His early college entries appeared as matter-of-fact descriptions but progressed into tomes of emotional distress and psychological disorder. This became apparent when he began to examine his academic choices that questioned his mathematical capabilities.

Every cell in my body is screaming at me to do math. Every single one...It's like I've lost control over a piece of myself. I mean, I can get myself to do work for film class without a problem, but if I even look at the homework, which will obviously not be all that difficult if I sit down and get to it, it completely dissolves my will to work. It doesn't make sense. None at all. I mean, I can do anything else... everything else but I can't force myself to do math... (Gavin, Webjournal, 2002)

His voice had acquired a desperate tone, one that clamored for answers and validation. "Every cell in my body is screaming at me" reflected a growing sense of urgency followed by feelings of hopelessness, "It's like I've lost control over a piece of myself." Gavin's narrative suggested the beginnings of a downward emotional spiral that reflected in his academics and social life.

I'm really angry with whatever part of me is unable to get up and do math. Perhaps I am so disinterested in the subject matter that I desire not to do it? I'm disgusted by math. I'm really disgusted by math...It doesn't make sense. How can I like order, thinking, logic and yet be disgusted by math? (Gavin, Webjournal, 2000)

Eventually, the effects of increasing emotional isolation and negative thoughts encroached on his academic responsibilities. Antipathy and procrastination threatened even his love for mathematics.

Gavin sought answers to his questions through critical self-examination and became obsessed with reflections critical of his academic choices. Unable to find any answers through his existing coursework in mathematics/computer science, his frustrations led to a diminished self-confidence.

I'm afraid of myself too. I think it's because I don't know myself as well as I should. I sit here in front of my computer typing this and all the same time I'm scaring the hell out of myself, knowing that someone out there just might read this. Knowing that someone might just get a peek into who I am. (Gavin, Webjournal, 2000)

Gavin described extreme feelings of self-doubt, a "fraud" among students at this prestigious college. This insecurity could well have contributed to the closeted nature of these emotions that did not appear to be expressed through activities with the student community discourse.

I guess since I lack the support or understanding of my parents, it's hard for me to think that what I'm doing is worthwhile...I'm not as much of a loser as I used to think I am. (Gavin, Webjournal, 2000)

Although Gavin had already demonstrated longstanding capability and interests in mathematics, his self-confidence was in a downward spiral perpetuated by second-guessing his decision-making processes and academic performance. Gavin continually directed his negative emotions inward, eventually exhibiting self-denigration and emotional paralysis.

Then why am I doing this? Then why am I making things more difficult for myself? I don't know. I think it might be because I'm sick of being pathetic. I'm sick of sitting there and watching everything go by because of some lame excuse I made up to avoid injury. What am I supposed to do though? It's not like I'm like everyone else. I don't have everything together and I'm always scaring the hell outta myself these days by doing things that I just don't normally do. (Gavin, Webjournal, 2000)

Gavin's perspective impacted his social life as well as individual self-concept. He described a dual existence: his campus social scenes that contrasted markedly to the emotional isolation in his private internal world.

My friends are around, yes, but that doesn't mean that I'm not alone. Hanging out with the guys is fun and good company, but that doesn't cure the emptiness that's inside of me. I can't keep living this way. I know I can't. I just hope that the answer comes soon. I've never been known for my great stamina. (Gavin, Webjournal, 2000)

Gavin's perspective affected his social existence. He disconnected himself from interpersonal relationships on campus and a shared sense of campus community. This perspective also affected his long-term friendships because of concerns of commitment and intimacy.

The reading I did also talked about the child-parent relationship and that really made me think about marriage, children and so forth. And I think I'm deathly afraid of it all. Possibly because I'm insecure about my own child-rearing capacity but also because being of Korean ancestry really just complicates things even more. Being the first-born son, who'd want to marry me? ...I guess I just feel that my life would be easier and perhaps better if I never get married and never have children. (Gavin, Webjournal, 2000)

Gavin's attitudes vacillated between expressed desires for closer friendships and "deathly" fears of intimacy. His early perspective had become reflected through his social interactions during college and emerged as ambivalent friendship values, emotional isolation, and expressed fears towards commitment.

His entries reflected increasing feelings of futility as well as self-destructive emotions and behaviors.

To be honest, I think I'm developing some sort of personality disorder. I'm really angry with whatever part of me is unable to get up and do math. Well, suffice to say, I hold a great deal of rage against myself. I'm torn in two and the bad side of me is winning...or is it the good side? (Gavin, Webjournal, 2002)

Gavin's words reflected inner fear, rage, disgust, and futility. His self-criticisms were harsh, continually expressing feelings of negative esteem, blame, and hatred. For two more years, Gavin's emotions seemed to deteriorate into a directionless abyss of psychological turmoil. Eventually negativity overwhelmed his experiences and brought him to the low point of his college career. Seeming to be "at rock bottom," Gavin's nadir experience was marked by extreme negative emotions and self-image.

But I don't know where to start and the pain is so great. I'm drowning. I can feel it and I need to be pulled out! I need to be freed and there's nothing I can do except pray to God to get me out of this dismal death. I feel so weak and so tired. I feel angry with myself. And the worst of all, I feel so alone... And it hurts to know that I'm doing this to myself, but I just can't break it. I can't get out of this padded room. It's frustrating! If only I could get out of my skin; if only I could escape myself... I would let myself die to free myself from the bars I've set to my room...I'm weak. I can't break this horror that I've made. There is only pain. There is only darkness...And it's all my fault. (Gavin, Webjournal, 2000)

In contrast to his earlier narrative voice, Gavin's nadir description communicated profound emotional difficulties. Eventually, this angst threatened his psychological well-being, academic status, and social existence.

At any rate, I was lost and depressed in a sea of anguish, because I needed meaning to my teenage angst filled existence. (Gavin, Webjournal, 2000)

Gavin's perspective did not appear to include a vision of himself in a future society. His ambiguous self-identity had been based on multiple cultural communities during his past Home, Hometown, and School experiences.

At Oxford Hills, Gavin's conflicts appeared to become internalized into a private psyche, hidden from public scrutiny. His journal entries chronicled a private journey seeking personal identity through introspective examinations of a "NO me" perspective. Gavin's feelings of self-doubt became an impediment to his overall personal growth and identity development by exacerbating inner conflict, diminishing his self-esteem, and restrained his ability to express himself during college.

In his own words, "A Naked Singularity" referred to Gavin's unique perspective and solitary emotional existence that would only become revealed through later website postings. Gavin's experience described significant psychological implications of an Asian American identity experience that eventually triggered an emotional recovery through the perspective changes in "Mind Unraveled and Rebuilt."

#### "Mind Unraveled and Rebuilt"

"Mind Unraveled and Rebuilt" was the title of his final journal entry that summarized his efforts seeking an Asian American self-identity by reconciling conflicting Korean ethnic viewpoints. His experience represented a profound cognitive transformation that needed to re-examine personal beliefs and past experiences in order to interpret new meanings of identity.

I got it. I don't know why and I don't know how, but one night I got it. I'm not sure exactly where I was, nor what thought process led me to my epiphany, but God dropped like a cartoon anvil on my head... Then at [Oxford Hills], after continual emotional struggles with depression, somehow, God dipped his hands from behind the curtain of the heavens and helped me to realize my purpose with him. (Gavin, Webjournal, 2000)

After his darkest moments, Gavin's turning point occurred as an epiphany vision revealing life purpose. "I got it" marked the turning point in his "NO Me" perspective. In

order to "make sense of it all," Gavin needed to identify his personal motivations separate from the expectations communicated in past Home and School environments.

Wait... Yet again, understanding what motivates me, what gets me to work is the belief that whatever I'm doing will positively influence whatever future plans I have. Math never had that...Math, although easy, was never something that I believed fit into what I should be doing. (Gavin, Webjournal, 2000)

He began to understand a need for personal growth and self-fulfillment as part of his educational goals. Although mathematics came easily to him, his coursework seemed to be mismatched with his emergent perspective. He concluded that his learning could not be based just on innate capabilities like mathematics, but needed to include considerations of future life purpose. Gavin's positive vision included a future life purpose and a self-image as film-maker and historian.

I've been given a vision that I can see realized. Stories of family, stories that people just don't tell much, told in ways that aren't common...I mean, that's how powerful these stories are. I need to share them. I don't care if I'm not successful, just as long as these stories get told--as long as people witness their power. (Gavin, Webjournal, 2002)

He changed academic majors, turning to auteur theory and drama studies to express his creativity through film production. Gavin's new perspective revealed a newborn social existence and optimistic attitude contrary to the past viewed from his "NO Me" Perspective. For the first time, Gavin saw himself as a positive contributor in a future American society.

The mixed messages from past cultural communities resulted in a conflicted perspective of Korean American identity. Only after moving away from Home could Gavin achieve separation from the dominating influence of past cultural communities and gain a more distanced viewpoint that saw himself as a distinctive individual with values different from those past Home and School cultures. Personal transformation came after

"unraveling" subconscious negative belief systems and "rebuilding" a new identity from a changed perspective grounded in spiritual faith and optimism. The negativity and anti-social attitude found in Gavin's past perspective contrasted to the "faith," "hope," and "love" expressed through his new "Naked Singularity" viewpoint.

Gavin's introspective narrative revealed a deeply private personality hidden from public persona. He described a struggle with psychological depression with an eventual recovery through critical self-examination. His path of recovery depended on recognizing the roots of his angst, understanding himself through personally held values, and seeing himself as a positive contributor in future society. Only through creative expression, journal writing and film-making, could Gavin realize a self-identity that reconciled his emotional demons and realize his future in a vision using his storytelling ability through film media.

My road to truth wasn't an easy one, but God brought me into his light and to say I'll always be grateful would be an understatement. (Gavin, Webjournal, 2002)

Themes from Gavin's narrative reappear throughout the rest of this chapter. In the next section, Sarah echoes Gavin by describing a private experience reflected through academic pressure and significant psychological turmoil. She graduated at the top of her class at Oxford Hills College. Despite her apparent success, she describes a skewed personal identity grounded in academic values that held negative psychological and social implications.



## Sarah

Sarah was a South Asian American who graduated first in her class at Oxford Hills College just before the beginning of this study. In a class speech delivered just before graduation, she described the physical and emotional toll from her singleminded pursuit. Sarah's narrative spoke to an educational experience that was ultimately not measured by academic, professional, or financial goals with *hua-sheng* transformations that eventually guided her recovery from an eating disorder.

### Finishing Second

Sarah's world appeared to be hidden from most of her classmates during college. Ultimately, she shared intensely private thoughts and emotions to the entire college community in a class speech delivered just before graduating. Her parting words described a lifetime struggle that began when she was ten years old.

I'd like to tell you a story about a little girl, about the mistakes she made and the lessons she learned about what is truly important, and what is not so important...<sup>104</sup> (Sarah, Speech, 1999)

By the time she entered primary school, Sarah had demonstrated a competitive drive, steadily pursuing her goal to win the fifth grade school spelling bee..

You can imagine how excited she was, and it wasn't because of the \$25 check she received for winning; rather, it was the chance to represent her school in the town spelling bee that made her eyes sparkle and her stomach knot in anxious anticipation of the event. She practiced and practiced for weeks beforehand, until she knew the words backwards and forwards, in order and out of order. (Sarah, Speech, 1999)

Being the spelling bee champion of her school was "*the* most important thing in her life at the time." Sarah appeared energized by competition. Dreams of winning becoming the primary motivator during her intense spelling practices. But this childhood

recollection was bittersweet. The excitement of her earlier local victory vaporized from the ensuing loss, leaving her “devastated” after the regional competition.

I know what you’re probably thinking, “So she lost -- there are worse things in life that could happen...” But to this little girl that spelling bee was the most important thing to her life at that time. She got over it of course, but the stinging memory of her crushing defeat remained with her. (Sarah, Speech, 1999)

Sarah displayed a dogged perseverance, responding to her “crushing” defeat through renewed intellectual vigor. She even increased her academic resolve in high school “to work her very hardest” towards accomplishing academic excellence “this time with a new goal in mind – to graduate first in the class.” Sarah’s grandiose goal and her unwillingness to accept anything less was the source of her motivation and academic achievements. At the end of her high school career, she graduated “only second in her Class” with an acceptance offer from Oxford Hills College.

Now, there is nothing inherently wrong with having such a goal; however, in her case she sacrificed all else in the attempt to fulfill this ambition, and in the end, only came in second. She had been shooting for number one, and once again, victory had eluded her, just as it had seven years earlier. This time, defeat dealt a much harder blow to her, in fact that it nearly destroyed her. (Sarah, Speech, 1999)

Even though she had been honored as class salutatorian in high school, Sarah seemed to value her success recognized only through first-place finishes with all other outcomes as personal failures.

Here again, you may be saying to yourselves, “ Why did this girl make such a big deal out of being second instead of first? This is not exactly a tragedy here.” You’re right, of course, but this girl’s identity was tied up in being first – to her it was a symbol of winning and achieving – and when she failed, she lost more than just a title of “valedictorian”...she lost part of herself. (Sarah, Speech, 1999)

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<sup>104</sup> Sarah's words had been published in a historical collection of campus speeches.

Her high school vision appeared myopic, reflecting a skewed self-identity limited to unrealistically high goals measured only through academic achievements. Eventually, as Sarah continued her pursuit to become "Number One" in college, this one-dimensional perspective began to take a toll on her psychological well being.

#### "First in the Class"

Sarah rebounded with renewed intellectual spirit during her first two years in college. She spent hours immersed in coursework, sacrificing opportunities to meet other students in a life outside of the classroom.

When I first got to [Oxford Hills], I threw myself into my work...I spent the next two years secluded in the [Library], which is why many of you out there are probably wondering who this person is standing here. (Sarah, Speech, 1999)

In essence, Sarah had traded her social existence for academic achievement. She admitted graduating without many college friendships. Regardless of her emotionally distant stance, she still felt compelled to share this deeply private experience during the last meeting of her class body at Oxford Hills.

"Dedication" and "perseverance" marked a singular pursuit that overwhelmed all other aspects of her college life. This perspective jeopardized both physical and psychological well-being, eventually forcing her to confront the original emotional issues that led to eating disorder behaviors.

But even though I may have done well academically, I missed out on what college life is all about, I wasn't really happy. It wasn't until last year that I began to realize that there was much more to [Oxford Hills] than just academics. With the help of someone very special to me, I was able to overcome not only the eating disorder that I had suffered from for four years, but also the protective wall that I had used for so long to insulate myself. It was only then that I truly began to enjoy [Oxford Hills]. (Sarah, Speech, 1999)

Sarah's recovery began by recognizing the hyperbole of her viewpoint that defined success through academic performance. Her *hua sheng* insights were realized not through academic lessons and classroom experiences, but from her transformed viewpoint that defined success to include personal happiness.

### Success

I once read that 'There is not one big cosmic meaning for all, there is only the meaning we give to our life...' I would argue that this is true of what people call the '[Oxford Hills] experience' as well, for in these four years, each of us has given our own meaning to, and created our own unique, '[Oxford Hills] experience.' What is it then? That is something each of us has to answer for ourselves, in our own way...and I will leave it to you to do just that... (Sarah, Speech, 1999)

Only through close personal details in Sarah's narrative would the true nature of her college experience be revealed as extreme psychological turmoil and emotional deterioration. Her priorities and expectations that appeared to provide motivation and sustain her academic achievements actually contributed to an emotional crisis and mental breakdown that occurred during college.

Sarah's lifelong pursuit of success reflected a skewed perspective that could only define success as "The Number One" or not at all. The unrealistic nature of her inflated goals eventually became self-defeating, manifested as continual failure, diminished self-esteem, and increasing social isolation. Her experience culminated as a struggle with an eating disorder that jeopardized both physical and mental health.

Sarah achieved her lifelong goal, graduating at first in her Class. Ultimately, her difficult journey led to a transformed meta-perspective, a cosmic vision that recognized life purpose through personal success and future happiness. Her narrative reflected a

viewpoint with redefined boundaries extending beyond a singular academic dimension and a life passage from self-destruction to emotional recovery as her college experience.

While the specific details of an Asian American cultural identity were unclear, Sarah's perspective reflected ideals that have been commonly associated with immigrant perspectives in Asian American family culture. Sarah's account, articulated through personal narrative and emotional description, may also draw into question commonly held perceptions of Asian Americans identity based on academic measures of success. These questions warrant further study.

The next Section continues the academic question through Kim, a second generation Korean American who was a recent graduate of Oxford Hills. His voice spoke to the importance of formal curriculum studies to understanding differences between ethnic Asian perspectives as an integral step towards resolving an Asian American self-identity.

### Kim

Kim was a second-generation Korean American who had recently graduated from Oxford Hills. His narrative appeared as an editorial published to generate support for Korean language curriculum proposal being considered on campus at that time.

Kim described growing up in a family household reflecting parental Korean diasporic perspectives, embodied by *buhjah* expectations to become "crazy rich." His recollections described a continual influence of *buhjah* perspective throughout his life experiences that included his college years.

After graduation, he visited his parents' native Hometown in South Korea, seeking connections to his family diasporic heritage. After his pilgrimage experience, Kim

discovered a new *gyopo* perspective that viewed himself as an American-born Korean with new importance attributed to ethnic practices and Korean language fluency.

### Buhjah Expectations

Having been taught (rather repeatedly) that education is somewhat important, I studied hard as a child and had the fortunate opportunity to attend [Oxford Hills]...Having been raised by very traditional parents (and I emphasize very), I was nudged into science at a very young age...My father (like most first generation immigrants), however, wanted me to be a *buhjah* (crazy rich) and so encouraged me to take economics. (Kim, Essay, 2001)

Kim's early perspective was imprinted by the Korean diasporic beliefs that predominated in his Home environment. The formative nature of Kim's youth perspective was exhibited by a pervasive parental influence on decision-making processes even after leaving Home. This influence was illustrated in his college academic decisions such as choosing his economics major based on his father's *buhjah* expectations.

Academically, my Oxford Hills career was spent for the most part as your typical premed... So, I took a lot of science and economic courses and so didn't have much time for anything else. (Kim, Essay, 2001)

Kim's narrative appeared driven by questions of Korean culture and repeated questions examining his father's native Homeland past experiences.<sup>105</sup>

[His father] had no relatives in the States, was brought up in a difficult background, having both parents pass away even before he was a teenager. As a result, he is now strict and practical, with a serious desire to supply the parenting that he himself could not receive. (Kim, Essay, 2001)

Kim's narrative reflected a search for his Korean self-identity. Kim continued to have questions about his missing youth and the difficult immigration experiences of his father. He also sought Homeland stories that could provide meaning to the Korean traditions and practices that were observed in his Home environment.

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<sup>105</sup> Kim also made vague references to misunderstandings between father and son, suggesting conflicts attributable to his father's difficult youth and immigration experiences.

In Korea, face to face with relatives actually older than my father, I had the opportunity to learn more about my father's tough lifestyle... I was given the opportunity to learn who my father really was, including his fears and failures... I could learn about what kind of girl my mom was, and why my father came to the United States. I could learn why my father took Tae Kwon Do, and what my grandparents were like. (Kim, Essay, 2001)

As Kim began his journey to a South Korean Homeland, he anticipated finding greater understanding to his father's enigmatic *buhjah* perspective and discovering new meanings of a native Korean cultural heritage.

### Gyopo Perspective

Upon arriving in Korea, Kim needed to understand the native language of his Homeland Korean, to communicate at a basic level but also to share stories with his family relatives using their native tongue. Even after completing an intensive course, his Korean speaking ability appeared limited at best.

I can now say I speak it better. Unfortunately I have to say I didn't learn as much as I wanted to. But how much can you realistically learn from merely one month of classes? (Kim, Essay, 2001)

He soon discovered difficulties in mastering this foreign language and achieving Korean fluency during his short summer visit.

Everything is written in *hangul* (written Korean)...Unless you want to spend hours reading restaurant signs outside (risking getting either run over or pickpocketed), learn some Korean. Otherwise, instead of entering a restaurant to eat *samgehtang* (chicken soup), you might get *hwehbap* (raw fish)... I couldn't even express my anger in any form that the cab driver could understand besides an elevated voice and hand gestures. You think this is funny? Not when you're hailing down cabs with sick, drunk friends at five in the morning. (Kim, Essay, 2001)

Since he had just come from a successful academic experience at Oxford Hills, Kim was struck by the amount of difficulty encountered in mastering this new language.

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Learning a language is not as simple as learning economics or biology. Having minored in the former and majored in the latter, I found that not being able to communicate with my 83 year old uncle to be two or three orders of magnitude more difficult and frustrating than sitting in lab cooking acid. My entire family consists of forty to fifty people, but I can hold an intelligent conversation with perhaps four or five. This is more than sad. It's tragic. (Kim, Essay, 2001)

Kim had looked forward to meeting his family relatives, hoping to discover new oral histories to share with his family back home. However, his family reunions were much different than he had expected, limited by his rudimentary Korean skills.

Not knowing the language really hit home when I visited old relatives. Old relatives are important because they give you information about your parents that you could never even think to ask. (Kim, Essay, 2001)

Limited linguistic fluency hampered any efforts to communicate in family interchanges. Kim's awkward efforts to dialogue were also reflected through expressed feelings of insecurity and resentment.

It is obvious that my family was "desophisticating" their speech to me...Either they slowed their speaking speed or diluted their vocabulary. In addition, many of my relatives were children, ages 7 to 12. Imagine if you had a college educated blood relative 15 years older than you being unable to understand what you were saying because the vocabulary you were using was simply too complex. In short, you would be *chengpeeheh* (embarrassed). (Kim, Essay, 2001)

Kim described "frustration" and "embarrassment" during his family visits. His narrative reflected a sense of insecurity as a Korean ethnic and a growing self-consciousness of his American-born heritage and Korean linguistic inadequacies. His limited Korean vocabulary hampered efforts to learn about his family history.

I was given the opportunity to learn who my father really was: including his fears and failures. Unfortunately, I came away from Korea unable to do that, "simply" because I didn't know the language. (Kim, Essay, 2001)



The Korean trip initially seemed like a missed opportunity but Kim eventually realized its greater significance. He realized a newfound perspective that appreciated the role of native ethnic language, an invaluable communication tool for transmitting culture between Native- and American-born *gyopo* communities.

Imagine the conversations you could be having with [your parents] if you could speak to them in their native tongue? Have you ever thought how difficult it must have been to get here? Imagine how you would start a family in a foreign land with a foreign culture? The tragedy you've read in literature classes would have a tough time competing with a story you could get just by calling home. (Kim, Essay, 2001)

Korean language had been a shared cultural tradition that served utilitarian purpose in effective cultural transmission between immigrant generations. Kim's narrative suggested that Korean linguistic ability was also integral to distinguishing between *buhjah* and American-born *gyopo* viewpoints.

Who are you anyway? Are you American or are you Korean? This is the age-old question isn't it? ...Am I American simply because I don't know the language? Or am I Korean who just needs a smattering of language education to get back in gear? Or am I Korean American, sitting on the fence, with my own isolated community of *gyopos* (Korean American) in the United States, holding an eternal common experience with only those like me... Korean by heritage, American by upbringing. (Kim, Essay, 2001)

Kim journeyed to South Korea after graduation to seek a greater understanding of his Korean heritage. His *gyopo* experience highlighted cultural differences between diasporic and American born Korean perspective and was significantly influenced by English and Korean linguistic capabilities. These experiences suggested a perspectival change between diasporic Korean and American-born Korean perspectives through Korean language speaking capabilities and the dynamics of shared communication.

## Bruce

Bruce was a second-generation Chinese [Ice7]American from the Midwest. He had been recruited to play varsity hockey at Oxford Hills. His narrative reflected an early identity perspective of Asian transparency and negative Chinese self-images.

"Yellow Darkness" is an interpretation of Bruce's early experiences. It describes his early "race-free" perspective and his extreme negative emotions to ethnic Chinese and Asian images. Bruce's voice contributed to the existing discussion by detailing a nexus between the formation of Asian American self-concepts and perceptions attached to physical "Asian" attributes. "Vision and Light" describes the emergence of Bruce's newfound Asian American identity and perspective that recognizes personal implications from a racially defined social existence.

### Yellow Darkness

For numerous reasons, I was repulsed every time I thought about my flat face. I hated my dad when he spoke. I hated talking about being Chinese in classes with Caucasians. I cringed and often welled up in tears every time I said, "I am Chinese." (Bruce, Essay, 2000)

Bruce's early perspective described negative emotional extremes attached to his ethnic Chinese identity and his discomfort in Asian American social scenes. Bruce's voice described a range of emotions that varied from discomfort to hostility. His negative perceptions even included views of his parents, feeling embarrassed by his father's Asian accent (Bruce, Essay, 2001).

Bruce described youth experiences in an active hockey community and a mainstream Hometown "predominantly white culture, not just [from the] snow." His childhood stories of hockey competitions were bittersweet reminiscences.

I hated it when I heard players on opposing sports teams give the standard oriental martial arts Bruce Lee war cry: Waaaaahhh!! I hated the ethnic identifier on the back of my jersey... Why couldn't I just be white? I thought that might solve a myriad of problems in my life. (Bruce, Essay, 2000)

Bruce's experience also included an example of malicious speech that appeared to be a regular part of his youth hockey memories and was formative to his growing up as an Asian American. As he skated out to take his position onto the ice with his fellow teammates, the repeated taunts to his Chinese name became imprinted in his memory as messages signaling "difference." Instead of fond reminiscences, Bruce's youth sport experiences became the seeds of persistent negativity characteristic of a "Yellow Darkness" vision.

In addition, Bruce's perspective lacked a personal vision of positive Asian American role models. He lived in a Hometown "where the next closest Asian family lived no closer than three days journey into the great unknown" and shared contact through Chinese School classes and family relatives.

I was repulsed by the thought of Chinese school, Saturday remedial classes. I avoided the other Chinese girls in my high school like the plague. (Bruce, Essay, 2000)

Bruce's youth was limited to contact with Chinese diasporic culture. Bruce's youth perspective had been shaped by messages of "difference" from mainstream Hometown and Chinese diasporic perspectives. He expressed an adolescent desire to gain acceptance in his Hometown communities and directed his subsequent efforts to adopt a mainstream persona in that effort.

Growing up whitewashed, I was forced to forge an identity independent of any notion of an Asian American community... How was I supposed to know that being Asian was not a bad thing? (Bruce, Essay, 2000)

Bruce recognized himself as a reflection of the predominant images within his Hometown community. His whitewashed perspective reflected the assimilation of an Asian into the dominant culture of a homogeneous Hometown community. Bruce's whitewashed perspective also represented an attempt to deflect racial identity questions and conversations of self-identity associated with internalized negative emotions to Asian images. His narrative suggested internal conflicts stemming from messages of “difference,” negative emotions, and conflicted perceptions of Asian and American cultural identities. Unresolved questions continued to haunt him, eventually forcing him to confront his Asian American self-identity.

I wanted to know what it meant to be an Asian American. Was it important that I was Asian? Should I act a certain way or associate with certain people because I was Asian? Why did the lone Korean kid in my class constantly tell me that we needed to stick together and that The Man was keeping us down? It was an identity crisis of extreme measure. (Bruce, Essay, 2000)

His early “race-free” perspective could not provide a basis to understand the aspersions associated with an ethnic Asian identity. Unresolved, his adolescent yellow darkness escalated into an acute psychological identity crisis.

Because of his athletic skills, Bruce was recruited to play on the Oxford Hills hockey team. Yet, his college athletic career was short-lived, “after a year, the hockey thing wasn’t working for me and I decided to find out what an Asian American was.” Persistent questions forced Bruce to re-examine his perspective that eschewed any references to a Chinese or Asian American self-identity. He left the hockey team to devote more time searching for common experiences, eventually discovering an Asian American Bible study group as his campus home. This became Bruce's nuclear

community, the only environment sufficiently supportive and comfortable to sustain a painful journey of self-discovery that ensued.

My story is one of sadness turned to dancing and darkness turned to light. This is a story of self-discovery. (Bruce, Essay, 2000)

### Vision and Light

Overcoming his initial aversion, Bruce was able to share common experiences in a Bible study group within the Asian American student community. This experience triggered a perspective shift that viewed his existence in a different Light and positive Vision. Bruce's new identity was reflected by changes from "sadness" to "dancing" and "darkness" to "light." His emergent Vision contained a different self-image with spiritual identity and positive life purpose.

I have found a spiritual identity that hasn't suppressed my cultural identity, but rather complemented it. I have been freed from these imagined bonds that too often dictate life's course...I know I am created with a specific design for a specific purpose in life...I am thankful that my life has undergone a radical transformation of spirit as a result. (Bruce, Essay, 2000)

Bruce's emergent perspective contained a positive self-identity that appeared to have separate spiritual and cultural identities. His new Vision also held a self-image that validated his existence through social contexts that contrasted with an earlier egocentric orientation. He soon discovered connections between his negative Asian images, self-hatred, and whitewashed perspective that eventually led to a new identity.

For those years that I could not bear to be Asian, the weight of wearing the label destroyed my spirit. Until I found a spiritual identity I would continue to live in shame... For me this has meant that with Jesus' death on the cross comes the symbolic crucifixion of the hatred, shame, and bitterness of [Bruce]. (Bruce, Essay, 2000)

Bruce's narrative revealed a lifelong effort to suppress his Asian identity and continued negative aspersions. His experience described personal changes reflected

through a newborn spiritual identity, positive Asian self-image, and voice of optimism. In contrast with his past darkness, his new values emphasized internal qualities, "passion," "energy," "vision," and "compassion," and reflected a forward thinking approach.

His voice questioned identity approaches and perspectives reflecting homogeneous mainstream culture. Instead, he appealed for a new Asian American identity "not to reveal our inner Caucasian-ness" but to affirm a perspective "neither racially nor ethnically specific."

Let's be musicians, poets, writers, dancers, history makers who happen to be Asian American. We need to peel the banana. What are you passionate about? (Bruce, Essay, 2000)<sup>106</sup>

Bruce's emergent viewpoint still seems unresolved. He described a newborn identity with "de-essentialized ethnicity and essentialized spiritual identification." In "peeling the banana," Bruce metaphorically called for the elimination of physical definitions in the construal of Asian American identity. Regardless of the incomplete nature of his new Perspective, Bruce's experience still represented significant personal changes through emotional and self-identity transformations. For the first time, his self-identity viewed both Chinese and Asian American identities in a positive light in contrast to the negative extremes expressed in "Yellow Darkness."

I love being an Asian American. I love my dad and his funny accent... I want to be part of a Bruce Lee generation that is not afraid to kick some ass. I want to see some miracles. I want to awaken the dawn. I want to dance with angels. And if they happen to be Chinese angels, that's ok too. (Bruce, Essay, 2000)

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<sup>106</sup> The banana metaphor was used on conversation to describe the fruit as "yellow on the outside, white on the inside." This phrase is part of common vernacular usage used as a reference to describe "assimilated" Asian American culture.

Bruce arrived at Oxford Hills with a "race-free" viewpoint and ethnocentric beliefs from his impressions of past Hometown and School Cultures. He sought to resolve conflicts stemming from his past experience and yellow darkness perspective. Through retrospective self-examination, he confronted the "hurt of the past" and turned "hatred, shame, and bitterness" into an optimistic vision and positive self-image. In doing so, he gained a racially cognizant perspective accompanied by the emergence of a newfound Asian American self-identity. Despite redefining personal values and realizing a new Asian American identity, his narrative suggested an incomplete resolution regarding questions of ethnic and racial identity specific to his Asian American perspective.

Bruce's experience adds a racial dimension to the existing discussion of Asian American experiences. He described the profound realizations that, "for the first time, saw my Chinese Face." His narrative was an example of an ethnocentric, yet racially defined, Asian American self-image. It is significant because it represents the college experience from the perspective of a member of a visible minority that often seems missing in larger discussions of diversity.

Bruce's voice also articulated details of negative emotional extremes that added psychological and social dimensions to the Asian American college experience. He described an acute sensitivity to Asian images based on an internalized negative self-image and manifested by internal pressures of self-loathing and social aversion to interpersonal relationships within Asian social scenes.

## Erik

Erik was a second generation Asian American who grew up in a predominantly white suburb, adjacent to a Chinatown community. He described his memories of Chinatown visits to share *dim sum* breakfast with his father on “streets that were not my world.” His fondest childhood memories were of typical American scenes; eating favorite foods and watching television with his best friends.

Erik grew up in a multiethnic Home with ethnic traditions rooted in Sino-Burmese cultures. His American youth perspective was shaped by mainstream beliefs from his Hometown experiences. Erik's narrative spoke to the influence of Hometown cultural homogeneity and the ethnic differences between diasporic and American-born cultures on the development of Asian American perspectives (Erik, Essay, 2001).

Erik's early identity perspective was consistent with assimilatory experiences reflecting a homogeneous Hometown community, "*I wanted people to see beyond my Asian-ness.*" His quest for meanings of Asian American identity through the student community discourse was described in a detailed narrative detailed his realizations of newfound Asian American identity through the emergence of a racial cognizant perspectives.

Erik's experience represents a transition from an Early Me perspective shaped by perspectives in his past Hometown experience. He provided a retrospective description that distinctive Me perspectives that influenced the emergence of racial cognizance and Asian American self-identity during College.



"Asian Invasion" describes tacit assumptions of "Asian-ness" attached to physical features. These revelations triggered heightened self-consciousness that also impacted campus friendships and social scenes.

Erik's Senior Me perspective emphasizes unexpected ramifications from a newfound Asian American perspective. This narrative articulates a distinctive Asian American perspective through personal and social implications of racial identity.

### Early Me

While my features were Asian, my mind was distinctly American. Watching hours of television every night, Kirk Cameron of *Growing Pains* and Fred Savage of *The Wonder Years* were the two American males I emulated. My two best friends were white. I preferred the taste of pepperoni pizza and hamburgers to rice cakes and soybeans. (Erik, Essay, 2001)

Erik's ethnic perspective was distinct from the diasporic Asian ethnic viewpoints of his parents. He considered his Asian ethnic traditions unimportant to his self-identity. He recalled a father-son moment sharing *dim sum* breakfasts in a Chinatown where the "streets that were not my world." Instead, he seemed to place greater significance on experiences commonly associated with contemporary American culture. His fondest memories recalled watching television, sharing pizza, and playing videogames with friends. Kirk Cameron of *Growing Pains* and Fred Savage of *The Wonder Years* were the two American males he emulated (Erik, Essay, 2001).

Throughout his early experiences, Erik described an increasing sense of physical "difference" and awareness of "Asian-ness." These experiences were formative to Erik's perceptions of Asian American self-identity and identity definitions. His memories provided a different account of "Hallmark cards" and "school," symbols typifying Americana culture. Instead of nostalgic references, these became associated with messages of "difference" and "skin color" and contributed to his steadfast ideals that

viewed racial differences as "transparent."

During Erik's youth, his early "race-free" experiences appeared to affect an ethnic identity as well. His perspective differed from the predominant ethno-cultural focus of the Asian American Oxford Hills community that celebrated ethnic practices to foster greater community unity. Instead, his behaviors suggested negative perceptions toward ethnic and racial self-definitions and public disavowal of any personal associations with his Sino-Burmese heritage.

I tried to make my "Asian-ness" transparent, an invisible shell that people could look past in order to see the "real" me... I never spoke Burmese in front of my friends, nor did I declare that my favorite food was *onokowsweat*. When friends asked if I knew how to speak Chinese, I emphatically proclaimed, "No!" (Erik, Essay, 2001)<sup>107</sup>

Contrary to his expressed "race-free" preference, Erik appeared to prejudge ethnic and racial groups. His impressions formed from social observations contributed to a perspective that seemed to limit interpersonal behaviors and dialogues in these social scenes.

The homogeneity of my high school further contributed to my assimilation into the mainstream. While it had a large minority population of Blacks, Latinos, and Asians integrated into the social framework, true diversity did not exist within school boundaries. I had an extremely diverse group of friends in high school, but we never talked of racism as if it did not exist within our borders. I believed that people should put aside differences and come together as a tight community. (Erik, Essay, 2001)

Erik's negative perceptions towards visible minority social behaviors can be partially accounted for by his restrictive definitions of community and community organization. Using his own words, any grouping based on race or ethnicity was "anti-assimilatory" and "racist" and, therefore, contrary to his expressed preferences towards

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<sup>107</sup> *Onokowsweat* is a traditional dish served in Burmese households.

“true diversity.” However, these perceptions seemed to limit his discussion within socially defined social scenes.

I felt students who joined such groups, not just [Asian group name] but other ethnic-based clubs as well, banded together for no other reason than their ethnicity. I personally wanted friends who judged me for my inside, not my outside. (Erik, Essay, 2001)

Despite describing past experiences with "diverse" minority student populations, Erik's narrative suggested a perspective that eschewed the importance of ethnic and racial definitions in the construal of "race-free" self-identity. Erik's early perspective was formed from social communities in both Home and School past experiences. His early narrative suggested a preference for homogeneous communities, for friendships that “felt natural in the mixed company of whites and other minorities” and social circles that resembled his Hometown community. Erik arrived on campus with an identity that reflected mainstream cultural beliefs from his Hometown community and "race-free" ethnic and racial identity ideals that would influence his Freshman Me perspective.

If someone asked me freshman year what I believed in, I would have said, “I believe in me.” The freshman “me” believed that race was a non-issue and that it could be hidden from view. (Erik, Essay, 2001)

#### “Asian Invasion” and Freshman Me

Erik arrived on campus with an Early Me perspective, anticipating an enriched experience with new friendships and broadening interests. Despite arriving with his expressed "race-free" ideals, his narrative suggested profound perspective changes that stemmed from a seemingly casual conversation during freshman orientation.

“There goes the Asian invasion,” my friend said without turning his head. I snapped my head towards him and looked incredulously. “What?!” I gasped. “There,” he responded pointing to the Asian American throng, “The Asian American invasion.” He turned to me and grinned. “Don’t worry, man, you’re different...” (Erik, Essay, 2001)

*"There goes the Asian invasion"* was an off-hand comment used to describe a group of Asian students walking across the courtyard. The casual conversational context suggests benign intent, but Erik's continued reaction spoke to a deeper personal significance. He would re-visit this experience often during his next four years in an effort to understand the next words spoken to him, *"Don't worry man, you're different"* (Erik, Essay, 2001).

As those five words rolled off his tongue, I could not help but feel both shocked and proud. I was shocked at the callousness of his statement, yet I was simultaneously proud that my friend had seen past my Asian features to recognize me as an individual. (Erik, Essay, 2001)

Erik's initial reaction was noted by mixed shock and pride. Also appearing in paradox was disillusionment from his "race-free" beliefs and his desire to become accepted as a member of this new college community. Initially, he responded by developing heightened sensitivity and acute self-consciousness while in the presence of other Asian American students.

I once sat down with six friends in [the cafeteria]. As the conversation darted back and forth, I became keenly aware that I was at an "all Asian" table. Desperate to avoid any labeling so early into my [Oxford Hills] experience, I quickly excused my self from the table and left. (Erik, Essay, 2001)

The initial impressions from "Asian Invasion" became the basis for Erik's social decisions during his freshman year. His early attempts to socialize with other Asian American students were accompanied by acute feelings of self-consciousness. Increasing discomfort eventually led him to avoid socializing with any Asian American students on campus.

In doing so, I closed the door to a place that many other Asian Americans on campus would call home. However, it was my impression that joining such a group would also limit the type of friends that I would make. [Oxford Hills] students often quickly label Asian Americans who self-associate as “one of those” Asian Americans. (Erik, Essay, 2001)

The rest of that year was spent actively affirming his “race-free” convictions. Erik chose only those relationships and activities that affirmed his “race-free” individual interests. However, the unrealistic nature of his perspective would soon be revealed through the fleeting nature of “one of the best periods of my life.” During the following year, Erik described increasing negative emotions and feelings of isolation.

I never doubted that I had made the right decisions because I made numerous acquaintances from all parts of campus during freshman year, which was one of the best periods of my life. But this made the sobering reality of sophomore year feel much worse. As many of my friends found homes in the Greek system or in other cliques, I found myself alone. While I had many good individual relationships, I had no coherent group or place to fall back on, a home to call my own. (Erik, Essay, 2001)

Instead of experiencing the “enriched” campus social life he had expected, Erik found himself increasingly distant in existing personal friendships and isolated from the campus community. Gradually, Erik began to understand a connection between his “race-free” viewpoints and his current unhappiness.

The mirage of freshman year was over. Perhaps the reality was always there, I had just neglected to see it further. It was naïve to believe that race was a non-issue. To deny that racial boundaries existed was to deny an important part of myself. In a community that forced me to reassess my identity for the first time, I was not just American, but Asian American. My Sino Burmese heritage was not something to suppress but something to understand. (Erik, Essay, 2001)

“The happy mirage of freshman year was over” foreshadowed a turning point in Erik’s ambivalent self-identity. His unsettled emotions led him to re-examine his past relationships and reflect why he chose to distance himself from Asian American social scenes. His narrative suggested the presence of social associative identify formation

behaviors. His past experiences and campus perspectives suggest assumptions of an Asian American group identity based on physical appearances.

Minorities on this campus often face the decision whether they should associate primarily with other minorities or whether they should integrate into the mainstream. For me, by not joining any of the large Asian organizations, the decision was made for me. I was relegated to the latter. (Erik, Essay, 2001)

Erik had distanced himself from any ethnic Asian and pan-ethnic Asian American communities that could risk imposing assumptions to his individual identity. In his effort to avoid an imposed Asian American identity, Erik's "race-free" perspective resulted in superficial friendships and social choices that were personally unrewarding.

Erik's perspective became transformed when he realized how an ambiguous Asian American self-identity and ensuing social preferences had contributed to his existing emotional isolation. He described how an ambiguous Early Me self-identity became changed into his Freshman Me as an emotional response to the events in "Asian Invasion." His unsettled emotions led him to examine his personal beliefs that included considerations of past experiences formative to his newfound Senior Me perspective.

#### "Senior Me" and Home

Erik's experience was a personal journey in search of meanings to his Asian American self-identity that concluded with the emergence of his Senior Me perspective. His final narrative described the social transformations that accompanied the emergence of a racial cognizant perspective and Asian American self-identity.

If someone asked me freshman year what I believed in, I would have said, "I believe in me." The freshman "me" believed that. If I were asked that question now, my answer would probably be the same. But the senior me understands that we wear race on our skin, that we can never hide it. (Erik, Essay, 2001)

In contrast to a Freshman Me that believed "race was a non issue," Erik's Senior Me now understood differently because of his Asian American experiences. He gained racially cognizant insight towards understanding the formation of Asian American identity that included assumptions associated with physical appearance. For the first time, he understood his experience through a visible minority perspective, as a person who wears "race on our skin." His Senior Me perspective attached permanent meanings of "opacity" to "skin" and "race" in his considerations of Asian American identity. Erik's Senior Me voice described how the revelation of implicit assumptions of "Asian-ness" impacted his own self-identity and accompanying social transformations during college experiences.

Erik arrived on campus with his "race-free" ideals, ready to spend "the best years of his life" at Oxford Hills College. His first year was spent determined to "make my 'Asian-ness' transparent, an invisible shell" with students who could see "the *real* me." Increasing disillusionment eventually caused Erik to seek new relationships that could provide emotional comfort and shared sense of community. Eventually this pursuit led him back to the same student communities he had scrupulously avoided in the past. His initial feelings were eventually overshadowed by a new appreciation of the ethnic communities that joined together in pan-ethnic celebrations of Asian cultures. Eventually, Erik was inspired to learn more about his own ethnic identity.

I remember attending the Culture Night my junior year and realizing how much pride students had for their customs, a pride that I had suppressed for so many years. I went home during that spring break and learned to cook onokowsweat. (Erik, Essay, 2001)

Erik gained a sense of ethnic pride that encouraged celebrating Sino-Burmese heritage. Instead of suppressing his cultural traditions, he eventually became comfortable expressing his Rangoon self-identity, cooking his favorite *onokowsweat* with his friends.

Erik's relationships were originally premised on common Asian ethnic interests but these boundaries eventually expanded into greater friendship. The changed nature and expanded dimensions of his social existence were unanticipated meanings that became profoundly significant in retrospect.

I am a senior now. This winter break, as I sent out my Christmas cards, I noticed that roughly half of them were addressed to my Asian American friends. I scratched my head and thought about it for a second, unsure if I was happy or disappointed... Three years later, the complexity of the issues has not faded. I cherish my diverse group of friends. (Erik, Essay, 2001)

In contrast to the avoidance behaviors of the past, Erik's social scenes now included Asian American students. From this community, he formed a close-knit circle of enduring friendships that appeared to provide the very sustenance that had been elusive during his early college years. Erik's Senior Me perspective reflected changes based on a newfound Asian American self-identity but also through rearranged social boundaries defining friendship and comfort zones.

Home is a place to feel "safe and comfortable" and is "what each of us makes of it." Throughout life, I have defined and redefined the meaning of home, and every answer to the question transforming as I learn more about myself. (Erik, Essay, 2001)

Erik's narrative brings this conversation back to full circle with the discussion of Home now redefined according to an emotional space. Erik's early perspective reflected a vision of Home based on cultural impressions from the past and a viewpoint dominated by physical existence and geographic location. He graduated with a Senior Me



perspective suggested a social transformation and new vision of home. Erik's new Home was defined by an emotional dimension of security and comfort.

Erik's transformation reflected individual transformations of a newfound Asian American self-identity and emergent racial perspective that echoed Bruce's experience, "seeing my Asian Face for the first time." However, Erik's narrative added a different perspective by emphasizing social transformation through changed definitions of "difference" and accepting attitude towards interpersonal relationships with other Asian American students. His Senior Me perspective that valued his Asian American friendships contrasted sharply with behaviors of aversion and avoidance exhibited in Erik's earlier experiences.

#### *Hua-sheng: Transformation and Self-Discovery*

*Hua-sheng* is a Chinese term that means "transformation." Gavin, Sarah, Kim, Bruce, and Erik described the significance of college experiences as life passage lessons, revealed through perspective transformations. These narratives described past/present cultural experiences formative to newfound perspective and self-identities as Asian American students at Oxford Hills. During these transforming experiences, personal emotions appeared to be internalized to form a negative psychological dimension that was initially unapparent in their public persona. Yet these psychological difficulties affected an every-day campus existence through negative self-images, diminished self-esteem, and profound psychological turmoil.

Each narrative suggested significant psychological stressors that originated from past Home, Hometown, Homeland, and School experiences and deteriorated during campus existences. The psycho-social ramifications of conflicted perspective and

ambiguous self-identity included negative "Asian" self-image, diminished self-esteem, conflicting ethnic and racial definitions, self-loathing, diagnosed eating disorder, clinical depression, expressed group aversion, and social isolation behaviors. Changed perspective was profoundly significant, affecting positive mental attitude and newfound self-identity with realizations of a future role in American society. Sarah, Kim, and Gavin suggest Asian American ethnocentric perspectives with experiences affected by academic achievement. Bruce and Erik exemplified a different perspective with Asian American self-identity based on perceived physical imagery and negative assumptions of an "Asian" image.

Gavin's story was distinctive, first, in its description of profound emotional and psychological consequences of a conflicted ethnocentric Asian American perspective and, second, for his use of journal writing for introspective self-examination. The depth of his emotional experiences reflected intense internal conflict through specific references to clinical psychiatric disorders. Yet Gavin's private world appeared to be unnoticed publicly until college when negative self-concepts, mental health issues, and declining academic interests threatened to jeopardize his entire college career. The profound nature of his individual experience may be partially accounted by the level of personal detail and nature of solitary introspection unique to journal writing narrative. However, aspects of his experience were echoed in each of the other narratives in this chapter.

As first in her classm Sarah's experience exemplified a skewed perspective based solely on past School experiences and validation only through academic success. Intellectual motivation and supportive environments fostering academic success are clearly valued in contemporary educational approaches and inculcated through messages

within American society. Her story illustrated how messages of educational priorities and academic success can become misinterpreted to form a skewed perspective of hyperbolic expectations with emergent consequences during college.

While details specific to her South Asian American self-identity remained unclear, her experience exemplified cultural beliefs towards educational priorities and values of success, common cultural values in Asian American families. Her narrative was consistent with emerging socio-cultural research that suggest alternative educational experiences that counter popularly held images of Asian American student success stories.

In comparison, Kim's college experience appeared relatively uneventful. His experience exemplified an emergent ethnocentric American-born perspective attached to academic concerns. His perspective changed from "having little interest in Korean American experiences during college" to a new *gyopo* perspective realizing a Korean American-born existence after graduation.

His narrative described a multiple ethnic cultural perspective that may carry implications beyond Asian American identity perspectives reported in the existing research. In describing disparate native Korean and *gyopo* perspectives, his narrative suggested the significance of immigration history and ethnic language fluency as significant cultural variables within collective Asian American perspectives. Furthermore, Kim explicated the use of ethnic language beyond the standard application as a basic linguistic tool for communicating literal, translated meanings. His narrative explicated socio-cultural linguistic meanings attached to Korean language fluency as a

necessary requirement for cultural transmission through shared oral traditions between native-born and American-born Korean cultures.

Kim's narrative suggested the importance of bilingual fluency in promoting understandings of multiple Asian American perspectives and shared communications between ethnic populations separated by immigration history and diasporic perspective.

Lastly, Kim's experience highlighted a historical pattern suggesting an institutional recalcitrance and apparent inability to meet the expressed needs particular to the demographic population of Asian American communities on the Oxford Hills campus. His essay, originally written in support for the Korean language initiative, seemed to reflect a mismatch between the Oxford Hills curriculum and needs of Korean American students on campus.

In contrast with positive Korean ethnic values of Kim's essay, others appeared to have negative aspersions connected with ethnic Asian identity and self-image. The narratives of Gavin, Bruce, and Erik suggested that ethnic and racial identity were in fact, conjoined entities inseparable from physical definition. These narratives described negative self-perceptions of "Asian-ness" and "race-free" viewpoints from homogeneous cultures found in past Hometown experiences.

Gavin, Bruce, and Erik exemplified a perspective of a visible minority student on campus as a distinctive Asian American racial experience. Their accounts described subconsciously held racial viewpoints, negative ethnic perceptions, and social aversion behaviors that appeared contrary to the prevailing ethnocentric perspectives in this student campus community.

The individual transformations of Gavin, Bruce, and Erik recognized the idealistic nature of previous "race-free" convictions through explications of tacit assumptions that were formative to an internalized negative image and imposed "Asian" identity. Gavin and Bruce's experiences emphasized the psychological dimensions of Asian American racial perspective through the emergence of racial cognizance reflected by realizations of future life purpose and positive self-image transformations.

Erik echoed Gavin and Bruce's perspective, but his account placed a greater emphasis on social interactions affected by the external perceptions of Asian American students through imposed group identities. "Asian Invasion" was specific to the emergence of racial cognizant perspective during college attached to profound realizations of a visible minority student. Although tacitly existing in hidden campus culture, these beliefs appeared to exert subconscious effects on everyday campus existences with profound realizations when explicated. Erik's narrative exemplified the significance of emergent racial perspective through changes in social boundaries and community comfort zones as a distinctive Asian American racial experience during college.

The use of personal, emotionally descriptive narratives revealed the distinctive nature of Asian American perspective as private existences marked by negative emotional extremes, psychological turmoil, diminished self-esteem, and feelings of self-loathing. Gavin and Sarah described profound psychological turmoil that contrasted with a public persona that appeared "successful" by standard academic measures and community participation. Their experiences exemplified progressive consequences from unresolved self-identity and negative emotions that jeopardized psychological and physical well

being. Their private existences eventually deteriorated into self-destructive psychological disorders that led to acute emotional and psychological crises during college.

These Asian American perspectives affirmed aspects of the socio-cultural themes previously found in the collective community discourses. The college experiences of Gavin, Sarah, Kim, Bruce, and Erik represented educational life lessons interpreted through past, present and future narratives. Their distinct voices detailed cultural experiences from past Home, Hometown, Homeland, and School communities that were formative in their early perspectives and self-concept development. The narratives of these Asian American students suggested significant psychological connections between present perspective and past cultural communities through psycho-sociological manifestations affecting everyday campus existence. Each of these voices described the personal significance of college experience through profound perspective changes affecting cognition of ethnic/racial self-perceptions and interpersonal/intergroup social interactions.

These experiences underscore the profound influence of past and present perspectives that affect psychological, social, and emotional dimensions of Asian American college student experiences. These narratives suggested a collective psycho-social cultural perspective based on multiple ethnic cultures, racial cognizant perspectives, family values, immigration history, and ethnic linguistic capabilities that influenced academic, psychological, social, and emotional dimensions of everyday campus existences.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSIONS

#### Separation and Difference

What did it mean to be an Asian American student at Oxford Hills College? This research interpreted common experiences provided by individual narratives and community discourse dedicated to seeking meanings of shared Asian American *han* identity. Detailed personal descriptions were provided by voices articulating psychological and social dimensions of individual experience. The findings from this research study have implications with respect to the social formation of Asian American *han* perspectives during college, as well as suggest factors for consideration in higher education policy decision-making processes needed to support the needs of the Asian American students.

Many students began college by searching for comfortable campus spaces that resembled familiar associations of past Home and Hometown experiences. At the end of four years, these students articulated realizations of a newfound Asian American *han* reflected by changed definitions of "home." Over time, home appeared to change from a physical setting to a new home described through *pathos* that is a psychological associated with emotional comfort. Such changes of home perspective suggest the profound nature of perspective transformation associated with realizations of Asian American *han* identity described by these students.

Where then is home? Is it the place one leaves, the land one imagines, or the plot upon which one stakes a claim? For Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, it has been at times all of the above. To search for a home is a basic human need, but there has never been a guarantee that each will succeed in its pursuit. (Yonsei, Essay, 1998)

These students described insights from introspective self-examinations and shared experiences that were often only revealed through common discourse with Asian American peers. The quest for a new campus "home" led to realizations of a newfound identity understood through social roles within the college communities that were integral to everyday college life. The existing circumstances regarding issues with curriculum and residential life contributed to difficulties in locating Asian American perspectives within campus communities. In seeking communities of acceptance, these voices suggested interpretations of "like and unlike," "difference," and "crossing boundaries" that were dependent on understanding past cultural backgrounds as alternative frames of reference existing as distinctive Asian American perspectives.

Many of these students arrived on campus with perceptions from friendships and life back home in homogeneous Hometown communities. For these students, the quest to explore a newfound *han* required crossing social boundaries established by their past Hometown communities, socializing with Asian American brothers and sisters often for the first time on this campus. These voices described an Asian American community engaged in crossing social boundaries and meeting those unlike themselves, yet to the general campus community these very activities were often viewed as isolationist or self-segregating.

For many of these students, college represented the first time living away from home for an extended period. Campus entry afforded an opportunity to examine oneself



through core beliefs distinct from those values imposed by past cultural communities. In this sense, the Oxford Hills Experience began as a physical separation from closely-knitted family environments that ended with a newfound identity collective Asian American *han*, accompanied by bittersweet realizations of difference to impact the everyday existence at Oxford Hills College.

### Asian American Han

The quest for *han* began by participation in campus discourse opportunities offered through student organizations dedicated to sharing experiences between Asian American students. "Living and learning" about being Asian American was sustained by the commitment and intense efforts from the student community. For these students, participating in the Asian American community discourse meant new friendships and different social scenes that eventually revealed newfound Asian American *han* self-identity perspective.

The efforts to "make sense" of shared experiences provided insights into the perspectives of both students and the institution. This study describes the social formation of an emergent *han* perspective through bittersweet meanings of "living and learning" at Oxford Hills College. These findings provide an interpretive framework for Asian American *han* through self-identity concepts and socialization in past Home, Hometown, School, and College experiences.

The emergence of racial cognizance appeared unique to Asian American college student experience in this study. revealed a newfound Asian American self-identity accompanied by vacillating emotions, mixed messages of "community" and "difference," attached to profound *hua-sheng* insights from perspective transformation.

The Asian American *han* represents a conjoined ethnic-racial identity influenced by psycho-social interactions during past Home, Hometown and Homeland experiences and the present-day academic residential community of Oxford Hills College. The ethno-racial duality is shaped by ethnic-specific beliefs and family values learned from Home, self-images reflected from the surrounding environments of the American Hometown and College communities, and meanings of individual experiences interpreted according to the participant's perspective situated within the community-at-large.

Despite the commonalities of a collective Asian American *han*, this study also suggests marked intra-group differences according to disaggregated variables revealed by further interpretation.

#### Ethnicity and Socio-Cultural Linguistic Differences

This study also describes *han* expressed through an ethnicity that remains influenced by differences in immigration experiences reflecting American acculturation. Although the sample population included students from a range of mono- and multi-ethnic households, the voices of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean mono-ethnic students predominated in this study.

Ethnicity remained emphasized through emergent Diasporic and American-born perspectives. This distinctive identity was influenced by family, school, and American hometown cultural communities that continued to affect experiences during college as well. The findings regarding ethnicity were revealed after disaggregating the data according to immigrant generation, time period living in American society, and duration of American education.

Socio-cultural linguistic schisms appeared to affect communication dynamics and social interactions in family and college experiences. Differences between immigration generations were influenced by language fluency and collective beliefs pertaining to family success during American acculturation. Voices representing first- through fourth-generations were included in this study. The emergence of 1.5 and second-generation voices was an unanticipated finding that revealed the significance of the American-born perspective.

Further studies are needed to examine student perspectives that appeared absent from this sample population, particularly those representing South and Southeast Asian cultures. Accordingly, this study provides a basic template for similar further studies as well as a foundational institutional perspective to conduct such similar examinations at the Oxford Hills College campus.

#### "I See MY Face" Ethno-Racial Identity

In addition to understanding divergent ethnic cultural identities, these students also needed to grapple with the ramifications of a distinctive Asian American imposed identity. Students described college transition accompanied by profound realizations understood through viewpoints of oneself as a visible minority student and perceptions of "Asian-ness" existing within the college community.

These findings describe an Asian American *han* described through interrelated ethnic and racial identities that appear to co-exist as a complex conjoined entity. Ethno-racial identity was shaped by psycho-social interactions within formative communities of past and present-day experiences. Ethnic identity appeared in continual tension that varied from an ethnocentric "racelessness" to an emphasized racial perspective of

"Asianness." As students continued to explore issues regarding this ethno-racial nexus, emotions progressing from ethnic celebration plummeted through dissonance and "darkness."

"*I See My Face*" described expectations associated with an ethno-racial identity that appeared as self-images of "Asian-ness" and assumptions of group behavior that seemed part of a campus culture. These findings articulated a distinctive social-associative Asian American *han* identity seen through the lenses of Asian ethnicity, immigration acculturation, and visible minority student.

"What I'm not is what I should be" Expectations as External Stressors<sup>108</sup>

Yonsei's comment captures the reality of an imposed Asian American identity understood through expectations and assumptions attributed to various social communities. He summarizes unintended consequences of this ethno-racial identity associated with increased stress and diminished self-concepts. Although having already demonstrated significant achievements previously, it seemed these voices articulated an Asian American identity attached to external sources of stress through expectations acquired through social interactions within family, American hometown, and school communities.

These findings suggest an alternative viewpoint of identity far different from the commonly portrayed images linked to minority success. The increasing campus presence of Asian American students supports the call for increased resource allocations during budgetary decision-making processes.

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<sup>108</sup> Yonsei's comment was made during a group presentation discussing Asian American role models in contemporary American popular culture. (Yonsei, Group Discussion, 2000)

These voices articulated how expectations associated with filial piety and family obligation appeared to affect academic decision-making and self-esteem issues while in college. These findings reveal the need for academic advising and counseling professionals who are familiar with the college student issues identified in this study. Such counseling resources need to demonstrate familiarity with Asian American identity understood through psycho-social formation of self-concept and community culture. These implications warrant further cross-cultural comparisons between different college campuses examining variables such as immigration history, American education experiences, and linguistic capabilities.

Different expectations also appeared between first-generation and American acculturated perspectives as a socio-cultural linguistic schism affecting parent-child and college student peer relationships. While open campus communication may ameliorate differences between college students, the findings suggest a permanent widening socio-cultural linguistic schism between parent-child during college. The implications from the socio-cultural linguistic schism are clearly obvious by improving campus climate and facilitating student communication. However, these findings also suggest a significant impact on social relationships within the family that warrant further examination after graduating from Oxford Hills.

Further cross-cultural comparisons are warranted to study Asian American college student experiences on separate campuses that can differ dramatically according to ethno-racial demographic characteristics and nature of the institutional settings.

The heterogeneity described by socio-cultural linguistic schisms and ethno-racial nexus is distinctive to the Asian American experience. These findings describe Asian

American *han* as a multiple perspective influenced by American immigration history, Asian ethnic language fluencies, and racial identity, that is necessarily part of American experience. Since each socio-cultural variable carries different cost-benefit implications, these findings emphasize the need for further higher education cultural research examining disaggregated student data specific to the institution as well as cross-cultural multiple institutional comparisons.

This study furthers the discussion of multicultural perspectives in higher education with suggestions utilizing interdisciplinary approaches. Such suggestions may appear particularly daunting to institutions highly vested in their esteemed academic reputations and longstanding traditions. Yet, the institutional research reveals a history of patterns that substantiate the argument for non-traditional solutions. In addition, additional on-site research is warranted to examine academic and residential opportunities available for student community discourse exploring shared Asian American experiences and newfound self-identity perspectives.

As a cultural study of higher education, this research has implications in curriculum development, organizational management, and student life. This study emphasizes the importance of tailoring decision-making policies and resource allocation decision to the needs identified by the ethno-racial and sociocultural variables found in a given Asian American population.

#### *Pathos as Cognitive Dissonance*

The emotional details provided by the personal narratives appear to signal the emergence of newfound identity and perspective transformation. These narratives suggest that questions of Asian American cultural identity were consistently attached to

some form of emotional conflict suggestive of cognitive dissonance, explained as a pre-emergent expression of *han*.

The individual voices provided descriptive details adding *pathos* to the psychosocial dimensions of human experience. This discussion provides a sociocultural explanation of *han* that is fluid, affected by the nature of individuality, cognitive processes, and social interactions. These findings are consistent with the Mead Model of Self and counters specific *theoria* characterizing identity as discrete entities or fixed stages.<sup>109</sup>

The negative self-concepts which frequently accompanied ethnic identity beliefs contrasted with the positive feelings of sodality provided through the student ethnic organizations. Individual voices articulated deleterious consequences of internalized negative self-concepts which only became realized during college through examples suggesting academic pressures, psychological, and social disorders which ultimately jeopardized student well-being during the Oxford Hills College experience.

These narrative details illustrated life experiences different from popular images found in contemporary American culture describing "model minority" students. The individual narratives revealed closely-held emotions describing internal existences of deep-seated turmoil and psychological pain. These private dimensions were often eventually revealed through self-destructive behaviors that impinged on academic performance, mental health, and physical well-being during college. Further cultural studies in higher education are needed to examine cultural beliefs as possible external sources of psychological stress experienced by Asian American students during college.

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<sup>109</sup> These models have been described as "essentialist" theories and criticized by suggested implications of "authenticity" (Lowe 1996).

The ethno-racial nexus appeared as a continual tension between an ethnocentric perspective with expressions of "racial transparency" and racial cognizant viewpoints accompanied by descriptions of "Asian-ness" and a noted progression of increasing dissonance and plummeting emotions into "darkness." *Pathos* was described through cognitive dissonance as a signal of an impending emergence of racial cognizance. perspective.

The use of *pathos* revealed the presence of racial viewpoints existing as an omnipresent entity, often internalized into subconsciousness. Heightened emotions were found expressed by students, faculty, and College President regarding issues of racial identity and cultural diversity.

In this sense, this study provides an explanation of racial perspective that is necessarily part of human existence although may be unrealized through internalization into subconsciousness. *Pathos* appears as a manifestation of cognitive dissonance to signal the emergence of a new perspective that was previously unrecognized through internalization. These findings support the Mead and Omi Models of identity formation based on social interactionism.

#### Implications for Higher Education

This study also identified unmet needs of a growing pan-ethnic student population with applications for student affairs and interdisciplinary curriculum programs.

#### Multiculturalism and Campus Diversity Strategies

These findings describe a campus climate noted by heightened sensitivity towards matters of race and diversity. The omnipresence of racial identity demonstrated by

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*pathos* has clear implications supporting the need for multicultural diversity strategies that are not just directed towards student or minority groups. Instead, these findings reveal the necessity for the full participation of all members within the college community. The apparent lack of academic consensus regarding social relevancy of racial identity and inconsistent levels of diversity support available to these students exacerbated the existing issues identified by the community discourse. Furthermore, the tendency to conflate ethnic Asian with Asian American racial identity further problematized difficulties in obtaining resources that could have met the specific needs expressed by this student community.

The omnipresence of *pathos* appears to validate the call for inclusive multicultural strategies requiring the participation of all college community members, majority and minority alike. Further studies are warranted to examine the needs identified by these Asian American students, resource allocations in comparison with issues of other specific interest groups on this campus.

### Curriculum and Pedagogy

While there was a genuine widespread expressed appreciation of the existing two Asian American courses and the contributions of the student community to campus life, this appreciation was overshadowed by the relegation of collective community discourse opportunities to co-curriculum status. This single circumstance appeared to confound issues of race with ethnicity, exacerbating existing difficulties described through socio-cultural linguistic schisms and heterogeneous ethnic Asian perspectives.

These voices articulated a clear need for an Asian American Studies Program to examine shared experiences in the formal classroom and residential housing

arrangements away from public scrutiny. To this end, this study provides a possible curriculum template for an interdisciplinary Asian American Studies Program that utilizes the existing academic disciplines and student activities. These student voices were articulated through multiple forms of expression utilizing the "tools of the intellect" such as critical analysis, retrospective self-reflection, dialectic reasoning, and community discourse. These texts serve as concrete examples for the implementation of a critical inquiry program in Asian American cultural identity studies which was repeatedly called for through the voices of this student community and external visitors to the campus community.

To date, the questions surrounding Asian American academic curriculum remains an issue on this campus. This problem is further exacerbated by institutional perspectives that appear conflicted concerning the relevance of racial identity to the curriculum, with clear preferences expressed towards ethnic cultural perspectives defined by geographic location on foreign soil, the established reputation in existing Asianist foreign language studies on this campus, and the popular trend emphasizing a global worldview perspective in contemporary American society. These perspectives are valid considerations in the pragmatic deliberations of the common core curriculum in higher education. However in this particular case, these positions must be re-considered to examine for unanticipated consequences such as misrepresenting American-born through foreign Asianist cultures as illustrated by the existing Oxford Hills curriculum.

Inconsistent multicultural approaches in curriculum development, resource allocation decision-making policies, and residential life opportunities for this student population warrant subsequent cultural studies detailing the on-campus experiences of the

Asian American students at Oxford Hills. These findings have significant implications in higher education resource allocation decision-making considerations to support the specific needs of Asian American students in peer institutional settings in higher education. This research provides a template for cultural studies in single setting sites. Such studies can guide informed resource allocation decisions and long-term strategies based on demographic composition and perspectives of the respective Asian American campus population.

These findings underscore the need for further cultural research to examine institutional gatekeeping mechanisms for change and faculty perspectives delineated by specific disciplines within the existing curriculum. These narratives suggest the critical importance of dedicated faculty and administrative resources in maintaining the institutional memory as a common basis for a vision of long-term strategies needed to address the needs of future populations of Asian American students on this campus.

These findings are specific to the expressed needs of this Asian American campus community with suggested implications applicable to peer institutions located in rural settings. Further cross-cultural studies are warranted at Oxford Hills College to identify factors which may have contributed to the protracted history of institutional difficulties in responding to repeated academic initiative proposals, affinity housing considerations, and requests for dedicated faculty, counseling, and administrative personnel as supportive guides for decision-making processes of Asian American students.

In conclusion, this discussion explains Asian American college student experience through increasing conflicts, emotional dissonance, psychological pressures, cultural expectations, and identity misperceptions. This study contributed insights into Asian

American college student experiences that revealed the distinctive nature an emergent ethno-racial *han* understood through the context of multiple cultural perspectives.

These voices articulated the emergence of Asian American *han* identity during college through self-discoveries and transformation. The findings described shared experiences through psychological, social and emotional dimensions. The recognition of ethno-racial identity demonstrated a wide-ranging impact through transitional, academic, ethnic, and racial experiences. This study provided insights into campus culture through explicit and implicit messages articulated by representative voices of the college community.

Past-present themes from the student community discourse were validated by past-present-future interpretations from the individual narratives. Together, these narrative voices emphasized a need for increased resources to address academic, student life, and mental health issues specific for Asian American college students

## EPILOGUE

### FINAL MUSINGS

These students have long since graduated, taking with them personal meanings from profound revelations of Asian American identity and lasting friendships from four years spent at Oxford Hills. They are now part of a living legacy of Asian American alumni through voices that affirmed and revealed more questions about "living and learning" at this academic residential community. Ultimately, the real meanings of these stories are yet to unfold, only to be revealed throughout adulthood in lessons experienced after graduation.

This study involved many years of painstaking inquiry and self-scrutiny. In many respects, this research seemed much more exciting through a continual source of new discoveries compared to past experiments done with test tubes of microorganisms. This project reveals the true nature of experience studied through psycho-social dimensions, but yet there still remains an inexplicable dimension that can contribute to human individuality expressed through passionate emotions and creative thinking.

Part of this experience encompassed personal questions from the realization of being permanently tied to one's "Asian-ness" regardless of self-identity. I was struck by how differently this subjective research process seemed compared to the graduate work in Microbiology. These student experiences were very different from my own college years three decades ago.

Yet in some respects, the stories remained similar sadly suggesting less progress than I had originally thought. There were also some times during the analytic process that required brief cessations and personal reflection. The horrific events of 9/11 forced an in-depth examination into the relevancy of this endeavor in the broad scheme of life itself.

According to social interactionism, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to replicate these findings even if conducted at Oxford Hills today. This begs the original research question. Asian American studies with a challenge for higher education to respond to the heterogeneous voices of the Asian American college students at Oxford Hills College. What does this research really mean about progress in understanding the issues of Asian Americans in college since the beginning of this research area during the sixties?

*Finally her vision is complete. When the weaving is finished, she sits back to admire the cloth that she created. The warp that took so long to thread are now embedded, hidden by the weft of fibers that seem to dance with colors. Her fingers touch the cloth to feel the textures interwoven in a pattern to produce a landscape that vaguely resembles a place in her own memory. The rolling hills, blue water, and wisps of clouds are a peaceful scene that could be anywhere.*

*She frowns and searches for her glasses. Once worn, she smiles as the familiar images of intersecting roads and paths where she once walked lead to an ocean beach lined with pebbles and rocks she had collected as a child, almost hearing the rhythmic crashing of the rolling waves topped by ridges of foam that she still loves to be near.*

*She muses about where this tapestry will be when she is gone... Might it be hung on a wall, appreciated as an artist's interpretation of nature? Or sewn into a quilt to become part of a larger piece that is stitched by familiar hands to provide warmth and comfort in the beds of generations to follow. Or will it become part of a new jacket, worn not only as adornment but also for its warmth during the harsh Maine winters.<sup>110</sup>*

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<sup>110</sup> The artist metaphor for Asian American scholars was originally used by Robert Chang (1993).

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## APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

# UNIVERSITY OF NEW HAMPSHIRE

Office of Sponsored Research  
Service Building  
51 College Road  
Durham, New Hampshire 03824-3585  
(603) 862-3564 FAX

LAST NAME	Einsiedler	FIRST NAME	Linda Chen
DEPT	Education - Morrill Hall	APP'L DATE	2/8/2000
OFF-CAMPUS ADDRESS (if applicable)		IRB #	2267
		REVIEW LEVEL	EXE

**PROJECT  
TITLE**

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research has reviewed the protocol for your project as Exempt as described in Federal Regulations 45 CFR 46, Subsection 46.101 (b) (2), category 2 .

Approval is granted to conduct the project as described in your protocol. Changes in your protocol must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval prior to their implementation.

The protection of human subjects in your study is an ongoing process for which you hold primary responsibility. In receiving IRB approval for your protocol, you agree to conduct the project in accordance with the ethical principles and guidelines for the protection of human subjects in research, as described in the Belmont Report. The full text of the Belmont Report is available on the OSR information server at <http://www.unh.edu/osr/compliance/belmont.html> and by request from the Office of Sponsored Research.

There is no obligation for you to provide a report to the IRB upon project completion unless you experience any unusual or unanticipated results with regard to the participation of human subjects. Please report such events to this office promptly as they occur.

If you have questions or concerns about your project or this approval, please feel free to contact me directly at 862-2003. Please refer to the IRB # above in all correspondence related to this project. The IRB wishes you success with your research.

For the IRB,



Kara L. Eddy, MBA  
Regulatory Compliance

cc: File  
Susan Franzosa, Education - Morrill Hall



## APPENDIX B

### SURVEY COVER LETTER

October 3, 2000

Dear [Membership of Asian American Organization]:

I am conducting doctoral research on Asian American students in college. The project includes surveying and interviewing Asian American students at "Oxford Hills" on experiences and perspectives which have been important in Asian American identity.

The information provided through the questionnaires and interviews will be presented in the final dissertation. The first stage of this project consists of collecting general background information with the survey questionnaire that is attached. Your responses to the survey will be kept strictly confidential; no individual will be identified with his/her responses. Your participation is entirely voluntary and will not affect your academic standing at "Oxford Hills." Should you wish to remain anonymous, I would be happy to mail you a hard copy of the survey with a self-addressed envelope upon request. The second stage of the project will consist of follow-up interviews from selected survey participants during the 2000-2001 year on specific details that emerge from the survey.

You have been identified by your participation in "Oxford Hills" Asian Organization. Your response is very important to the success of this project. The information you provide is important to promote further understanding of the unique experiences and perspectives of Asian American students in higher education. Enclosed please find the survey questionnaire (in WORD) format). Completing the questionnaire should require no more than 20 minutes. Feel free to distribute this survey to any other Asian American student (18 years or older) who may not have received notification. Please note that the emailed submission of your survey response indicates your agreement to informed consent as described in this letter.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions at [email] or the Office of Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Research at the University of New Hampshire (<http://www.unh.edu/osr/compliance/IRB/html>). I very much appreciate your completing and returning the questionnaire by October 20, 2000. Thank you for taking the time to complete the survey. I am looking forward to receiving your responses.

Sincerely,  
Linda Chen Einsiedler, M.A.  
Doctoral Candidate  
University of New Hampshire  
Department of Education  
[email]  
[voice]

APPENDIX C

STUDENT SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

**Personal Information (PI)**

PI1: Your age as of 10/15/00?  
\_\_\_ 18 \_\_\_ 19 \_\_\_ 20 \_\_\_ 21 \_\_\_ 22 \_\_\_ Other (list age)

PI2: Gender: \_\_\_ Female \_\_\_ Male

PI3: Year of graduation: \_\_\_ 2001 \_\_\_ 2002 \_\_\_ 2003 \_\_\_ 2004

**Self-Identification (SI)**

SI1: How would you identify yourself when introducing yourself to a co-Asian?  
\_\_\_\_\_

SI2: Would you identify yourself differently when introducing yourself to a non-Asian?  
If so, how? \_\_\_\_\_

SI3: What is your immigration background?  
\_\_\_ My parents immigrated to the US; I was born in the US.  
\_\_\_ I immigrated to the US as a child and have attend US schools since \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_ My grandparents immigrated; my parents were born in the US  
\_\_\_ My great grandparents immigrated; my grandparents were born in the US  
\_\_\_ Other (describe):

SI4: What is the ethnic background of your mother? \_\_\_\_\_

SI5: What is the ethnic background of your father? \_\_\_\_\_

SI6: What is the highest educational degree obtained by your mother? \_\_\_\_\_

SI7: What is the highest educational degree obtained by your father? \_\_\_\_\_

SI8: Do you have any relatives who attended "Oxford Hills"? \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Yes  
If yes, please indicate relationship to yourself (Example: brother class of '98)

**Home Experience (HE)**

HE1: Did your family observe any ethnic holidays at home? \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Yes  
If yes: please list \_\_\_\_\_

HE2: Did your family observe any cultural practices at home?  No  Yes  
If yes, please list \_\_\_\_\_

HE3: Were Asian ethnic foods eaten at home?  No  Yes  
If yes, how often per week?  5 or more times  2-4 times  1-2 times

HE4: What is your religious affiliation?  
 Baptist  Buddhist  Catholic  Jewish  Protestant  
 Other (list)

HE5: Does your family have discussions about discrimination and racism at home?  
 Often  sometimes  rarely  never

### High School Experience (HS)

HS1: What is the name and location of the high school from which you graduated?  
High School Name: \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_

HS2: How would you characterize your high school population?  
 Different minority groups represented  
 Predominantly white  
 Other (describe):

HS3: How would you characterize your closest high school friends?  
 Co-ethnic  
 White  
 Other (describe)

HS4: How frequently have you had discussions about being Asian or Asian American  
Before coming to college?  
 Often  Sometimes  Rarely  Never

HS5: What factors were important to you during the development of your racial/ethnic  
Identity as you were growing up? (Please list) \_\_\_\_\_

### College Experience (CE)

CE1: Are you a member of any of the following student activities?  
 Asian American Acting Troupe  
 Asian American Sisters  
 Asian American Big/Little Sibling Mentors  
 Asian Christian Association  
 Asian Association  
 Japan Association  
 Taiwanese Association  
 Korean American Association

- CE2: Are you a Board Official of any of the above organization?  
 No     Yes    If yes, which one? \_\_\_\_\_
- CE3: Are you a member of a fraternity or sorority?  No     Yes  
 If yes, please list. \_\_\_\_\_
- CE4: Have you attended any of the following Asian American functions in the past year?  
 Culture Presentations  
 Discussion Groups  
 List forums attended: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Film Series  
 Blood Donation Drive  
 Other
- CE5: What is your curriculum major? \_\_\_\_\_
- CE6: What is your curriculum minor? \_\_\_\_\_
- CE7: Have you taken any of the following courses? (check all that apply)  
 Asian American History I  
 Asian American History II  
 Seminar: Race, Ethnicity, and Immigration  
 Capitalism, Class, and Race  
 Race and Ethnicity in the United States  
 Asian Studies (list course): \_\_\_\_\_  
 Women's Studies (list course): \_\_\_\_\_
- CE8: How would you characterize your closest college friends?  
 Co-ethnic     White     Other (describe)
- CE9: How frequently have you had discussions about being Asian or Asian American after coming to college?  
 Often     Sometimes     Rarely     Never
- CE10: Rank the following 1 to 5 according to importance towards understanding your identity as an Asian American. (1 = most important)  
 Family  
 High school friendships  
 Athletics  
 Extracurricular (non-athletic) interests  
 Religion  
 College friendships  
 College curriculum  
 College faculty and administrators

Other (list)

**Miscellaneous (M)**

M1: You may use this space to add to, clarify your answers, or express concerns to any of the survey questions or related issues.

M2: Would you be willing to meet for an interview at a later date? (It would last approximately one hour.)

Yes  Maybe  No

M3: If yes, what term will you be on campus?

Fall  Winter  Spring

M4: Personal essays can provide a snapshot of a student's perceptions. Would you be willing to provide a copy of any personal essays that relate to being Asian American (like college admission essay, course paper)?

Yes  Maybe  No

M5: May I contact you with any follow-up questions by e-mail?  Yes  No

If yes, give e-mail address (if not already provided): \_\_\_\_\_

M6: Would you like a copy of the final survey summary?  Yes  No

If yes, give e-mail address (if not already provided): \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your participation. I look forward to receiving your responses. To submit your survey, please e-mail to: [Leinsiedler@mailbox.une.edu](mailto:Leinsiedler@mailbox.une.edu). I very much appreciate your completing and returning the questionnaire by October 20, 2000.

Linda Chen Einsiedler, M.A.  
Doctoral Candidate  
University of New Hampshire  
Department of Education

## APPENDIX D

### INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Dear \_\_\_\_\_ :

As we have discussed, I am presently conducting research focused on the experiences and perspectives of Asian American students in higher education. The purpose of this project is to elucidate the main social issues facing students at [Oxford Hills] College and is conducted under the guidance of Professor Susan Franzosa at the Department of Education in the University of New Hampshire (UNH). This is part of a doctoral dissertation project. I am seeking the input of students, administrators, and faculty. The purpose of this letter is to obtain your consent to be interviewed as part of this project. The interview will consist of a written survey and possibly a follow-up oral visitation. The survey should take about thirty minutes and the interview two hours to complete.

There are no experimental or evaluative procedures involved in this project. Your participation is voluntary. If you consent to be interviewed, I will ask you to discuss some or all of the following topics:

1. Your perspectives "Oxford Hills" as an institution
2. Your perspectives and experiences as an "Oxford Hills" student
3. Your perspectives and experiences as an Asian American
4. Historical/biographical information

Your responses will remain strictly confidential. Your responses will not affect your academic grade. Pseudonyms will be used for the school, community, and each interviewee. To help ensure confidentiality, I will have sole access to all interview notes or transcripts. You will have the option of saying things "off the record" that will not be disclosed in the final account. You may choose to end the interview at any time.

I am available to answer questions about this project at (207) 797-7261 extension 4276 or E-mail: [Leinsiedler@mailbox.unh.edu](mailto:Leinsiedler@mailbox.unh.edu) or the Office of Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Research at the University of New Hampshire (<http://www.unh.edu/osr/compliance/IRB.html>) with any questions concerning your rights as a research subject.

Please sign and return a copy of this letter if you agree to the above conditions. I have enclosed a second copy for your records. Your time and consideration is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,  
Linda Chen Einsiedler  
Doctoral Student; University of New Hampshire

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#### INFORMED CONSENT

The purpose of this project has been explained to me. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may exclude myself from the study at any time. I also understand that the confidentiality of all data associated with my participation in this project, including my identity, will be maintained to the fullest extent possible.

\_\_\_\_\_ I consent/agree to participate in this project.

\_\_\_\_\_ I refuse/do not agree to participate in this project

---

Name

Date

## APPENDIX E

### GENERAL OUTLINE OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Preliminary demographic information:

Name, Age, Graduating Class,

Ethnic identifier, Generation:

1. Family influences:

Family, relatives in U.S.

Immigration history

Parents' employment

Cultural Asian/ethnic celebrations

Parents, family, home

2. Language:

Ability to read/speak (ethnic language)

3. Pre-College Experiences:

Friendships: "close" friendships, dating

Discussions about "being Asian:" with friends, family

4. Self-Identification:

5. Ethnic / Racial (pan-ethnic) Identity:

Ethnic self-description:

Pan-ethnic self description:

What does being Asian American mean to you?

How do you think your parents see you (as more ethnic or American)?

How do you think your closest friends see you (as more ethnic or American)?

How do you think your classmates see you (as more ethnic or American)?

Are there times in your life when being (ethnic)/Asian American has been more important than others? Specify times?

Reflection on ethnic and pan-ethnic experiences in college:

Are there any differences between freshman year and now?

6. Social Scenes on Campus:

Comments made to you regarding ethnicity or race?

Personal thoughts /feelings; common words

Any examples of racism or discrimination on campus or in town?

College resources for Asian American students on campus

Participation in Asian American activities (curriculum and student programming)

Fraternity/sorority

7. Friendships

Friendships: (friends, favorite hangouts, special activities)

Dating Issues?

## APPENDIX F

### DEMOGRAPHIC DESCRIPTION OF THE OXFORD HILLS<sup>111</sup>

This description represents general approximations based on entering freshmen class profiles from 1997 to 2001.

#### Geographic Residence

There were approximately 2000-4000 students in the general undergraduate student community, equally divided by gender. A third of the students were from the Mid-Atlantic region, the next highest from New England, followed by lower numbers of students enrolled from the West, South, and Mid-West regions of the United States.

#### Race/Ethnicity

Asian American students represented the largest single population of student of color fluctuating between nine to thirteen percent. Both African American and Latino/a American students were approximately in equal numbers between five to ten percent, with Native Americans less than five percent. Less than one percent reported multiracial backgrounds. The preponderance of Oxford Hills students were reported to be approximately sixty percent White. Ten to fifteen percent of the students were reported as "unknown race/ethnicity."

#### High School Class Rank and SAT Scores

Approximately ninety percent of the freshmen class graduated in the top ten percent of their high school class. Seventy five percent of freshmen had combined Math/Verbal SAT scores equal or greater than 1450.

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<sup>111</sup> This was a general summary based on freshmen class profiles from 1997-2001. (Admissions Report 2001)



## APPENDIX G

### LIST OF DOCUMENTS PROVIDED FOR INTERNAL REVIEW

1. [Oxford Hills College] 1997-2002 Entering Class Characteristics
2. Description of Asian American Curriculum and Student Organization Activities
3. Comprehensive Description of Student and Institutional Data