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# Firing the canon : identity negotiation among Chinese American youth through the mediation of multicultural literature

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The University of San Francisco

FIRING THE CANON:  
IDENTITY NEGOTIATION AMONG CHINESE AMERICAN YOUTH THROUGH  
THE MEDIATION OF MULTICULTURAL LITERATURE

A Dissertation Presented  
to  
The Faculty of the School of Education  
International and Multicultural Education Department

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Education

by  
Susan Gold  
San Francisco  
December 2008

This dissertation, written under the direction of the candidate's dissertation committee and approved by the members of the committee, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of doctor of Education. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

Susan Gold

December 5, 2008

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Candidate

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Date

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November 20, 2008

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## CHAPTER I

## THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

## Introduction

*Dear Ms. Gold,*

*It's great to have you as my english [sic] teacher this year. You have taught me so much already. You have always picked the most Best (sic) books to read. They're always so interesting even though when I look at the book, it looks boring. As they say, "Don't judge a book by its'(sic) cover." I wish you have a Merry Christmas and spend it with your family and friends. Have a great new years (sic).*

*Violet Yee*

Violet first entered my class as a sixth grade honors student at Oceanview Middle School. She was one of a dozen students who returned to me in 2006, assigned to my eighth grade honors English class. I had worried about her all through sixth grade. The daughter of immigrants from Guangdong Province in China, her home language was Cantonese, although she was born in California. As a second language learner, she struggled to comprehend the challenging reading and to respond intelligibly in writing. In the eighth grade (despite a few traces of grammatical and language convention errors demonstrated above), she got high marks on reading response papers and quizzes. While she rarely raised her hand to participate in discussions, when doing rehearsed presentations in front of the class she made insightful comments in a clear, strong voice.

The card containing the message above depicts a fat snow person whose arms encircle two smaller snow people. She wrote the inside note in green and red ink, alternating by sentence, emphasizing certain words by a duplication of the word written in the opposite color underneath, slightly overlapping the word above. In this manner she decorated "english" (I was on her case about that one!), "so," "already," "always," "interesting," "boring," "Don't judge," "cover," "wish," "very," "Merry," "Christmas,"

“family,” “friends,” “great new years” (what was with this child and capitalization?). “Best” is singularly written in both green and red ink on the line (*and* capitalized mid-sentence). I guess she enjoyed *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee, 1960), our most recent class book.

As if the note wasn't sweet enough, she also enclosed a candy cane in matching green and red stripes. As I tasted the candy I wondered if the stripes were just decorative or actually contained the flavor. Was the flavor already blended or did my tongue blend the flavors? I looked at it as a metaphor for the semester, as I had systematically observed myself as a white teacher in the process of interacting with and creating multicultural curriculum for students whose “race,” “ethnicity,” and “culture” were constructed differently than mine. I choose the word “constructed” in reference to Omi and Winant's (1986) discussion of race as a social construction.

At the micro-level, race is a matter of individuality, of the formation of *identity*. The ways in which we understand ourselves and interact with others, the structuring of our practical activity—in work and family, as citizens and as thinkers (or ‘philosophers’)—these are all shaped biracial meanings and racial awareness... At the macro l-level, race is a matter of *collectivity*, of the formation of social structures: economic, political. And cultural/ideological...the racial order is organized and enforced by the continuity and reciprocity between these two ‘levels’ of social relations. p. 67

Ethnicity and culture are similarly socially constructed. Cornell and Stephen (1998) define ethnicity as “perceived common ancestry, the perception of a shared history of some sort, and shared symbols of peoplehood” (p.32), and suggest that definitions of ethnicity and race often overlap. In addition, they emphasize the transitory and situational nature of ethnicity, apparent in the use of the word “perceived” in their definition. Appiah (1985), in his discussion of W.E.B. Dubois's definition of race, notes



that conceptually race and culture overlap, since he feels that race is a fundamentally inaccurate concept.

Even if the concept of race *is* a structure of oppositions...it is a structure whose realization is, at best, problematic and at worst, impossible. ...Talk of “race” is particularly distressing for those of us who take culture seriously. For where race works in places where gross differences of morphology are correlated with ‘subtle differences’ of temperament, belief, and intention-it works as an attempt at a metonym for culture; and it does so only at the price of biologizing (pp. 35-37).

Appiah (1985) refers to culture as “hermeneutic understanding” (p.36), and “communities of meaning shading variously into each other in the rich structure of the social world “ (p. 36), once again referencing both the social and flexible nature of culture. While I agree that the parameters of race are mutable and permeable, often encroaching on the areas of ethnicity or culture, for the purposes of clarity I will refer to social categorization based on physical characteristics such as phenotype and skin color as race, and categorization based on characteristics such as geographical and/or national origins and language as ethnicity.

Cornell & Hartmann (1998) define culture as an interpretive scheme that helps an individual make sense of the world. Culture encompasses includes both visible aspects and artifacts such as food clothing as well as ideological aspects: values, beliefs, actions and interactions. It distinguishes what is acceptable from what is not (Phelan, Davidson, & Yu, 1998). Delgado-Gaitan and Trueba (1991) add that it consists of “social shared cognitive codes and maps” (p. 17), in other words, how we think and organize our ideas about personal experience.

The profile of Vicky’s eighth grade class was similar to others I had taught during my six years at Oceanview. I had 32 students between the ages of 13 and 14, 11 boys and

21 girls. According to the school district's labels, the racial and ethnic sub-groups (conflated by the school district) included six "other white," two Latinas, four "other non-white" (all "biracial"/bicultural including two Eurasian American, one Afro/Euro American, one Pakistani/Russian American), and 20 Asian Americans, mainly of Chinese descent. I don't have statistics on socioeconomic demographics. Most of the students were second or 1.5 generation Americans. Only two students were born outside the U.S., but both attended California elementary schools. Because of their high test scores, and subsequent high grade point averages, the school tracked my students from the sixth grade into the "honors strand."

Race, ethnicity, and culture construction are particularly pertinent to middle school teachers because issues of identity are most sensitive in adolescence (Erikson, 1968). At this age children begin to care about racial, social, language, and cultural differences and search for a way to fit in. As an eighth grade teacher I watch this process unfold. One of my eighth graders put it succinctly, "In elementary school differences didn't matter and now they do." For second-generation or 1.5 generation immigrant children this often involves making choices that distance them from either their home culture or the dominant culture (Hsu, 2000; Portes & Rumbaut, 1996).

The way children acculturate, adopting mainstream attitudes and styles, may be unacceptable to their parents. Several students have told me, "My parents don't want me to be American. They think it means I won't obey them." Yet teachers who are members of the mainstream U.S. culture expect certain behavior like being assertive and asking questions. While the process of identity negotiation challenges all children of this age,

teachers should be particularly sensitive to the complexity of negotiating identity for students outside the dominant culture and race.

Portes and Rumbaut (1996) assert that all immigrant families must deal with disorientation to some extent and this is exacerbated when the host culture's values are incompatible with traditional values and beliefs. For example, in traditional Chinese families, diligence and obedience are valued more than creativity and individuality. A student who is doing well on multiple-choice tests, where memorization is key, may struggle with a project involving a high degree of creativity. Teachers may need to provide more structure in an open-ended project to ensure students meet expectations. More research on how Chinese American students deal with their particular cultural disequilibrium will help teachers become better educators.

In the United States, a history of racism and exclusion has made the process of negotiating identity even more complex for students of color from first or later generation parents (Portes, 1995; Tuan, 1998; Waters, 1990). Identity may be ascribed rather than achieved (Louie, 2004; Kibria, 2002). Ascribed identity refers to the racial, ethnic, religious, cultural, or gender category(ies) in which others place an individual, whereas achieved identity refers to the identity an individual develops for him or herself which evolves and changes over time.

The following example from my own life illustrates ascribed identity: one of the Christian teachers at my school thoughtfully puts greeting cards in my box for every Jewish religious holiday. In fact, the cards are my main source of information for Jewish holidays since I have been in a synagogue only two or three times in my life, and then as a guest rather than a member of the congregation. I assume she is basing this identity on

my last name and possibly my phenotype. My achieved identity, the one I have chosen for myself, could best be described as ethical humanist.

In the case of my Chinese American students, one ascribed identity may appear to have a positive aspect: that of the “model minority,” but in fact is problematic (Kibria, 2002; Lee, 1996; Tuan, 1998). An example is the following dialogue with Jeffrey See<sup>1</sup>:

JS: People say, “You’re so Asian.”

SG: How does that make you feel? Does that make you feel proud, or do you feel annoyed and uncomfortable?

JS: Probably annoyed and uncomfortable.

SG: Why?

JS: Because it’s like they’re saying, “All Asians are smart, weak, are good at math.

SG: You mean you feel stereotyped?

JS: Yeah.

A tall, outgoing, athletic boy, he rejected the attribute of weak, often associated with a high grade point average (G.P.A.). And while he had been placed in the honors classes at Oceanview, he struggled with math. Varying degrees of resentment accompany this ascription. If spoken by another Asian, it could mean jealousy (you’re meeting expectations and I’m not) or irony (you’re proving the stereotype is true, making it hard for all of us). If coming from a non-Asian, it could mean exclusion, or even retribution (the competition is too tough so let’s get rid of it). This ascribed identity puts Jeffrey in a double bind. If he doesn’t meet the implied expectations, he disappoints; if he does, he irks. Although students of middle school age want to fit in, they also want to make their own choices about where they fit. Without an understanding of the complex social maze these students must navigate, even teachers with good intentions can unwarily ascribe inappropriate identities to their students (Gay, 2000).

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<sup>1</sup> Conversation with an eighth grade student, 2005.

Steele and Aronson (1995) use the term “stereotype threat” after their research showed students who thought they might be negatively stereotyped performed significantly worse on tests. However, the stereotype of the super student may have a devastating effect due to unreasonably high expectations. I have seen academically gifted students become so anxious, they forget things I know they know, or go into a tailspin if they get only an 89% on a test. It may also have the opposite effect, provoking a student to rebel.

Violet would not have taken all that trouble to fashion such a wonderful holiday message for me if she didn't appreciate me as a teacher. However, I still feel I have more questions than answers about appropriately performing my role as an educator of “other people's children” (Delpit, 1995). In fact, the comments made by her classmates when they were in my sixth grade language arts class first awakened my consciousness regarding identity negotiation in middle school and the teacher's role in facilitating it through the medium of young adult literature.<sup>2</sup>

In November of 2004, we were reading *Julie of the Wolves* (George, 1972) about a girl caught between the traditional Inuit culture of her ancestors and modern Americanized Alaska. When the main character's mother dies, her father, an Inuit fisherman, raises her in the traditional way. When the girl, Miyax, reaches the age of eight, her father's aunt demands that he send her to school to learn to read and write English. Miyax is happy living with her father and regards her great aunt with suspicion. I asked the small group reading with me in the library how Miyax felt about going to live

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<sup>2</sup> I am using facilitate here in the original Latin sense of making something easy, rather than guiding or controlling a process.

with her great aunt. One student said, “She doesn’t want to go with her aunt because she’s white.”

The remark took me by surprise. “Wait,” I responded, “Aunt Martha is her father’s aunt, her grandmother’s sister.” Everyone nodded.

“And her father, Kapugen, is full blooded Inuit, right?” Everyone nodded again.

“So how is he white?” A number of hands shot up. I realized they had just challenged my own schema of racial, ethnic, and cultural categories with their definition of white. Instead of calling on them, I said, “OK, get out your notebooks (they groaned) and answer two questions: “What is white?” and “Are you white?”

Their responses varied according to their heritage. The European American students defined white as having ancestors from Europe and pale skin, as did my one black student. However, my Chinese American students had a wide variety of definitions for the concept of white, including a way of behaving, the length of time one’s ancestors had been in the U.S., and the ability to speak English as a native. In addition, many described themselves as half white or partly white, although both parents were from Asia with Chinese surnames and Asian phenotypes. “White” and “American” were clearly synonyms in their minds, which then begged the question, “What is American, and are you American?” As we continued to discuss the topic, one student, Marie, who later became a participant in the study, said thoughtfully, “Now that we’ve talked about it, I think white is really about having status.”

Through the medium of the literature we read together, the students opened a new avenue of discovery for me. Since much of children’s literature involves identity negotiation, I decided to make that an explicit focus of the class’s reading. It was a topic

they were really interested in (louder groans when the bell rang), and a way for me to understand the world from their perspectives. Rosenblatt (1978) contends that the reader is a vital partner in making meaning of a literary work, “What a reader brings to the text will affect what he makes of the verbal cues.” Therefore, when using a piece of literature with a class, a teacher must expect the unexpected. Hearing my students’ definitions of whiteness gave me the impetus to delve into how they defined themselves, as Americans, as children of color, as second generation immigrants, and as ethnonationals, a subculture within a nation (Kibria, 2002).

Susan Kosante (2000) problematizes multicultural education when she questions whether it is possible to “represent another culture, embedded as we, the representors, are in our own” (p.112). She suggests that between teaching students to identify with the similarities and universals in all cultures (we’re so alike) and to differentiate between oneself and others (I’m normal and they’re not), there is a middle ground promoting a “tolerant curiosity” (p.114). But to gain that middle ground, according to Kosanke, one must reckon with Clifford Geertz’s (1983) admonition, “To see ourselves as others see us can be eye-opening... but it is from the far more difficult achievement of seeing ourselves amongst others...a case among cases...that the largeness of mind, without which objectivity is self-congratulation and tolerance an sham, comes” (p. 16).

In my attempt to provide windows and mirrors (Galda, 1998) for my diverse students, I often found the middle ground Kosanke (2000) refers to as elusive. My own education had not prepared me to teach outside the Western literary canon. And while I lived and worked in a city characterized by multiculturalism, removing myself from the

dominant hegemonic values that characterized my background in order to see myself as “a case among cases,” was every bit as fugitive as Geertz warns (1983. P. 16).

### Statement of the Problem

While there is a body of literature on identity among Chinese Americans, as well as other Asian Americans, in high school and college (Belden, 1997; Hsu, 1982; Lee, 1996; Louie, 2004; Portes & Rumbaut, 1996; Tung, 2000), as well as adults (Kibria, 2002; Tuan 1998), these studies make few references to the process of identity negotiation among the middle school age group. The participants in these studies often refer to remembered incidents and attitudes, but the voice of the middle school student is rare in the research. In order to provide the best education, teachers need more background information about the way their students describe themselves both as members of an ethnic group and as future participants in the ongoing process of shaping and defining American citizenship.

### Purpose of the Study

This study documents Chinese American early teenagers’ thoughts about how they situate themselves culturally, ethnically, nationally, and racially in relation to the larger society. In addition, it investigates the possibility of creating a comfortable and healthy space in a school setting to explore cultural, ethnic, national, and racial identity among second and 1.5 generation students of Chinese American heritage. Through the reading of multicultural fiction and non-fiction texts and class discussions, I raise the



salient issues of the social construction of racial, and ethnic formation in the U.S. and record the students' responses. Using this process, I hope to help students and other teachers imagine a community where historical social divisions are addressed critically with the intention of establishing greater social justice.

#### Research Questions

1. How do Chinese/Chinese American<sup>3</sup> youth negotiate identity in school?
2. How is literature a tool for negotiating identity?
3. How do I, as a teacher, facilitate the process of identity negotiation for Chinese/Chinese American students through literature?

#### Theoretical Framework

Because education does not exist in a vacuum, this study touches on more than one social science discipline: sociology, psychology, anthropology, history, as well as pedagogy, requiring a theoretical framework comprised of key theories from these related yet distinct fields of study. Similarly, identity negotiation involves both psychology and sociology. Hall (1996) describes identity as mutable, provisional, and situational:

Though [identities] seem to invoke an origin in a historical past with which they continue to correspond, actually identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language, and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not 'who we are' or 'where we came from,' so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves. They relate to the invention of tradition as much as to the tradition itself...  
Moreover, they emerge within the play of specific modalities of power, and thus are more the product of the marking of difference and exclusion, than they are the sign of an identical, naturally-constituted unity...(p. 4)

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<sup>3</sup> I'm using the term "Chinese" to reflect the categorization made by the school district and my own experience working with students who choose these categories

Bhabha (1994) concurs, “For identification, identity is never an *a priori*, nor a finished product; it is only ever the problematic process of access to an image of totality” (p. 51). Lowe’s (1996) view of Asian American identity adds the multi-vocality derived from overlapping layers of gender, nationality, ethnicity, culture, religion, history, class, and generation. She defends the acknowledgement of heterogeneity, hybridity (the process by which a new culture is forged at the interface of two cultures), and multiplicity among the subjects of the Asian American diaspora, opposing those who call for a uniform nationalism as well as those who mimic the same binary, us/them mentality of colonialism. These ideas are crucial to building an understanding of students who must be seen as individuals, each possessing a unique history and consciousness.

Hall’s (1996) concept incorporates the notion that for people confronted with colonialism or diaspora there are two components of identity: one of similarity and continuity, the common experiences and history of the culture of origin, and the other of difference and rupture, arising out of the shock of displacement and subjugation to the “other,” the Western colonizer. Thus the colonial subject has to deal not only with his or her mutable identity, but also the ascribed identity forged by the dominant culture in which he or she exists.

Since identity is as much a function of assignation, a superimposition of society’s view of the individual, as it is an achievement, a reconciliation of one’s various selves, any study of identity negotiation in the United States must take into account racialization. The United States in particular is a country that systematically uses race as a structural paradigm. The theories of Michael Omi and Howard Winant (1994) who view race as a mutable social construction address this aspect of identity negotiation and the way it

plays out in institutions such as schools. As William Tate (1999), one of the scholars responsible for bringing Critical Race Theory to education, puts it:

I recognize that race and education have longstanding political roots. These roots are often connected to the agendas of particular groups who desire to order society...I hope to make clear how politics is constantly a part of the fashioning process (p. 262).

Over the course of United States history, race, culture, and nationality have been used as a vehicle to divide and subdue populations in the interest of maintaining a hierarchical and ideologically hegemonic system. Gramsci (1971) explains hegemony as the “consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group” (p.12). Subordinate groups may rise up but they are always under control of the ruling group.

Historically, depending on who is speaking or writing, “Chinese” at times is defined as a race, at other times a culture, or a nationality (DuBois, 1968; Louie, 2004; Wu, 2002). In addition, even when Chinese Americans are officially designated an ethnic group, most European Americans cannot see ethnic differences, racializing all Americans who have an Asian phenotype. European Americans do not distinguish Chinese Americans from Japanese Americans, Korean Americans, or Japanese or Korean nationals. Hence Chinese, as well as other Asians, who have resided in the United States in substantial numbers since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, do not have the same “ethnic options” as white European immigrant groups. Instead they must deal with the designation of perpetual foreigner (Lowe, 1996; Wu, 2002).

To exacerbate the situation, any political enmity that may arise between a country in Eastern Asia and the United States has repercussions for all East Asian Americans, regardless of ethnicity. For example, in 1982 two unemployed autoworkers, believing

that Japanese car imports were decimating U.S. car sales, murdered a Chinese American, Vincent Chin (Kibria, 2002). In my own experience, while the U.S. was bombing Vietnamese villages in the late 1960s, a well-dressed, middle-aged European American man standing on the subway platform in New York City suddenly rushed us, physically threatening my Taiwanese college roommate, shouting that her “people” had killed his brother. Even in the postmodern multicultural milieu of twenty-first century America, my Chinese American students inform me that on at least one occasion a European American has asked them where they learned to speak English so well.

Bhabha (1994), a postcolonial theorist, explains why it is so important to break with the modern construction of culture which is determined by Western colonialism, characterized by its “authorized versions of otherness” (p.86) and embrace a postcolonial intellectual perspective including an acknowledgement of difference. Like Lowe (1996), he describes the interaction between the “first world” and the “third world” as a process of hybridization. People of the colonized, non-Western countries interacting with the Western European core may adopt aspects of the culture filtered through their own unique worldviews which are partially informed by the experience of colonization. The hybrid culture then becomes a place from which to negotiate identity and exert political agency.

Doubling repeats the fixed and empty presence of authority by articulating it syntactically with a range of differential knowledges and positionalities that both estrange its ‘identity’ and produce new forms of knowledge, new modes of differentiation, new sites of power...the metonymic strategy produces the signifier of colonial *mimicry* as the effect of hybridity—at once a mode of appropriation and of resistance, from the disciplined to the desiring.” (pp. 119-120, emphasis in the original).

For Bhabha (1994), progressive politics means a dynamic dialogue between everybody's truths as opposed to a liberal ideology in which the idea of tolerance is to defang and contain the opposition or the marginalized through co-optation. He disputes the 'relativistic' notions of diversity to assert that Western culture is created through interaction with other cultures, becoming itself a hybrid culture. The essential question he asks is, "How can the human world live its difference; how can a human being live Other-wise?" which he proceeds to answer, "We may have to force the limits of the social as we know it to rediscover a sense of political and personal agency through the unthought within the civic and psychic realms" (p. 64).

In the area of education my framework is based on theories of critical pedagogy developed by Paulo Freire (1992). According to Freire, teachers and students function in a dynamic relationship where learning is reciprocal. Rather than feeding students information, like nickels into a slot machine, an educator is compelled to draw on what he calls students' own funds of knowledge (Moll, 1990), guiding them to adopt a critical viewpoint and construct their own meaning. This approach has a component of action as well as reflection. The teacher and student(s) are expected to work collaboratively with the mutual goal of creating a more just and equitable society. As Gramsci (1971) writes, "...the relationship between teacher and pupil is active and reciprocal, so that every teacher is always a pupil and every pupil a teacher" (p. 350).

As a teacher, I have a unique relationship with the participants in my study, some of whom have been working with me for three years. They have been in my classes and have met with me in focus groups to explore Chinese American identity. For the past three years, in response to my observations of students, I have adjusted the curriculum in

my classes, which are predominantly Asian American, by expanding the amount of literature on Asia, and departing from the history textbook sequence by teaching Asian history first so that it becomes a base from which to compare and contrast other cultures.

As the students teach me more about their cultural frames of reference, I use that information to explain concepts and to create intercultural empathy. For example, when we talk about an amulet worn by a character in a novel set in ancient Egypt, I will ask how many of them have a piece of jade jewelry and why they wear it (for longevity), or I may reference Qin Shihuangdi, China's first emperor, when we encounter a character who wields a great deal of power. The more I reference the culture of my students, the more they inform me about their experience, which supplements my frames of reference. In turn, the stories I've shared with them about my life have added to their knowledge base. Students who have graduated often visit and remind me of stories I shared with them.

In reference to the sociological aspects of the study, I incorporate postcolonial theory, which challenges Western classical social science's notions of objectivity, insisting that researchers recognize the biases and limitations of their perspective (Bhabha, 1994; Ong, 1988). As a practitioner of teacher research, I have tried to view the classroom, including myself, through my students' eyes. As a European American woman working with a predominately Chinese American population, I believe it is essential to become cognizant of the cultural norms and frames of reference of my students (Banks, 1995; Gay, 2000; Paley, 1997). Education is politically, culturally, and historically situated. It reproduces the social order that spawns it. Teaching from a critical standpoint allows both students and teacher to attain a double vision (Rosaldo, 1989),

where analysis of the learning process becomes part of education. I also understand that, as critical researchers, we are in a sort of double bind. The very nature of our questions lends validity to the socially constructed categories we seek to deconstruct (Scheurich & Young, 1997). Yet without asking these questions, we are allowing the status quo to continue without challenges.

As a teacher of English, one of my challenges is to familiarize my students with the canon of literature that bestows cultural capital and distinguishes the educated American. However, students do not come to the classroom with a *tabula rasa* (Moll, 1990). My approach to teaching literature is informed by Louise Rosenblatt (1978) who describes reading as a transaction, “an ongoing process in which the elements or factors are...aspects of a total situation, each conditioned by and conditioning the other” (p.17). She theorizes that the background knowledge, history, and experience the reader brings to the text will determine his or her interpretation. Just as Heraclitus (2001) realized we could never step into the same river twice, we can never read the same book twice. By the second reading, our perception of the world, and therefore the word will have changed, in no small measure due to our previous our interaction with the book itself. Each year that I teach I discover something new about the literature I read with my students. Through our class discussions, they stretch me to imagine the literature in a new way, as I reach to pull the literature into their imagined and perceived worlds.

Rudine Sims Bishop (1990) specifies African American children when she addresses inclusion, but her words ring equally true for any marginalized group:

Literature functions as a major socializing agent. It tells students who and what their society and culture value, what kind of behaviors are acceptable, and what it means to be a decent human being. If African American students cannot find themselves in the books they read and have

read to them, they receive a powerful message about how they are undervalued in both the school and society (p. 561).

For this reason, I feel it is crucial to include texts in which my students can find themselves. Some books pass themselves off as multicultural by portraying characters with a spectrum of skin colors on the book jacket but contain nothing substantive to illustrate or reference the culture of the characters in the text itself. I feel true inclusion means showing differences as well as similarities between cultures, so that students are able to distinguish one culture's way of perceiving the world from another.

As a 2.5 generation immigrant (1.5 generation father, second generation mother) watching my students change and adjust their relationship to the United States, the nation-state of their birth, I am in the process of reforming my own views of what it means to be an American. As Gay states:

If teachers do not know how their own cultural blinders can obstruct educational opportunities for students of color, they cannot locate feasible places, directions, and strategies for changing them. Therefore, a critical element of culturally responsive teaching is cultural self-awareness and consciousness-raising for teachers (p. 71).

Through the process of reflection and analysis that this research requires, I believe I can become not only a better teacher, but also a better citizen.

#### Significance of the Study

California has 6,224,403 public school students. Their ethnic demographics in 2007 were as follows: 45.2% Latino, 33.7% European American, 11.2% Asian, Pacific Islanders, or Filipino, 8.3% African American, and 0.9% Native American. The state employed 309,773 teachers: 73.7% European American, 13.9% Latino, 4.6% Asian or Pacific Islanders, 1.1% Filipino, 4.9% African American, and 0.7% Native America (<http://democrats.assembly.ca.gov/members/a23/education.htm>).



These statistics demonstrate the number of students of color is in inverse proportion to teachers of color. This shouldn't make a difference except that the United States, a country established by and for white Europeans, (Ladson-Billings, 1999; MacIntosh, 1988; Omi, & Winant, 1994) has a history of exclusion, persecution, discrimination, segregation, stereotyping, and profiling of people of color, continuing into the twenty-first century (Ancheta, 1998; Okihiro, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1999). Because of this legacy, teachers may make harmful or alienating assumptions about students whose background is different from their own (Frankenberg, 1993; Paley, 1979). The victims, students of color, and the often-unwitting perpetrators, their teachers, suffer as a result. This creates a lose-lose situation for the country in general. Instead of deriving benefits from the cultural and personal contributions of immigrants and their descendants, we all must deal with the conflicts arising from the disaffection of marginalized populations. While the entire burden of inclusion cannot be laid at teachers' doorsteps, teachers can make a difference in students' self-concept and attitudes toward others (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1999).

Chinese American identities are still ascribed by the hegemonic "Western" values of mainstream American culture that sees all Asians as "perpetual foreigners" (Lee, 1996; Lowe, 1996; Takaki, 1989; Wu, 2002, Yuen, 2004). At this stage most of my students of Chinese ancestry do not self-identify as Americans, whom they perceive as white, blond, and blue-eyed. Teachers like myself must learn to help students work through the conflicts that membership in two cultures creates so they finally feel included and entitled to fully avail themselves of their rights as participating citizens in a democratic society.

Pre-World War II stereotypes portrayed Chinese as sneaky and unassimilable (Takaki, 1989; Wu, 2002). In contrast, since the latter half of the twentieth century, the stereotype has morphed into the overachieving “model minority” (Lee, 1996; Osajima, 1993). It is assumed that children of Chinese descent will behave well, succeed in school, and find high paying entry-level jobs. Like all stereotypes there is a kernel of truth in this assumption, but clearly not all Chinese American children or adults fit this mold (Lee, 1996; Min, 2002)

At Oceanview Middle School, the largest percentage of the student body is Chinese American. Being in the dominant ethnic group in the school provides recognition and validation for students of Chinese heritage, but the greater societal context does not. I have seen students struggle to reconcile the demands of membership in two very different cultures. In addition, Chinese Americans continue to be “otherized” (Louie, 2004; Lowe, 1996) and excluded. The under-representation of Asian actors on T.V. is one example (<http://www.hearushnow.org/other/8/asianamerican>). Hate crimes, perpetrated because economic downturns are viewed as the fault of Asian nations, are another. (<http://www.jacl.org/antihate/ahnews.html>).

Due to racism, Chinese Americans have historically encountered and continue to encounter intense psychological barriers, which negate their inclusion in American society (Lowe, 1996; Min, 2002; Wu, 2002). Although they may see themselves as an ethnic group, whites often assign them a racial identity they as individuals may not find at all appropriate. For example, Chinese who lived through World War II feel animosity towards anyone of Japanese ancestry, yet European Americans often categorize both groups under the term “Asian,” or even hold them responsible for actions or conflicts

involving another ethnic group (Tuan, 1998). Although some people find it advantageous to embrace the term Asian (Espiritu, 1992), it is more often for political clout than for perceived commonality (Tuan, 1998; Zhou, 2004). Stuart Hall (1996) writes, “[Identities] emerge within the play of specific modalities of power, and thus are more the product of the marking of difference and exclusion, than they are the sign of an identical naturally-constituted unity...” (p.4).

Because of their academic and economic achievements, second generation Chinese Americans as a group are perceived to have higher social and economic status than many other minority and immigrant groups (Kibria, 2002; Lee, 1996; Tuan, 1998). However, in addition to the identity crisis that most adolescents experience as they search for ways to affiliate and contribute socially (Erikson, 1968), these students also have to contend with racialization and marginalization (Lee, 1996; Min, 2002; Tuan, 1998). Even though the large number of Chinese Americans in California somewhat mitigates this marginalization, popular media promotes it. For example, as of the year 2000, less than three percent of the actors in films and television (including advertising) were Asian American (Yuen, 2002). Of those, the vast majority is cast in stereotypical roles. Chinese American men are still primarily portrayed as comical (Jackie Chan, martial arts stunt man), evil (nefarious minor characters on the CIA drama *Alias* who seek the downfall of the U.S. government), and Asian American women are portrayed as hypersexual, or dragon ladies (Lucy Liu). Recently, a “model minority” stereotype has been added to the stock cast of characters: Sandra Oh (*Grey’s Anatomy*) plays an unemotional surgical intern obsessed with her job, the embodiment of the model minority stereotype.

In the age of globalization and transnationalism, having more than one culture should be seen as an asset rather than a deficit (Suarez-Orozco, 2004). It is not in students' best interests, nor the country's, to continue to promote the myth of the 'melting pot' (Gans, 2004). Although one rarely hears the melting pot reference any longer, the pervasive expression "I don't care if they're blue, green or purple, I treat all students the same, I'm colorblind," references the same attitude (Frankenberg, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 1999). Constructing an educational environment that promotes critical thinking and diverse perspectives rather than the hegemonic expectation of uniformity will prepare our students to function in an increasing international arena where intercultural communication is essential (Suarez-Orozco, 2004).

The focus of the racial dialogue in the United States has traditionally been between black and white (Ancheta, 1998; DuBois, 1968; Loewen, 1971; Omi & Winant, 1994; Rodriguez, 2002). As recently as 1977, instruction manuals for census takers contained the following instructions: If the respondent's answer is 'American,' classify it as 'white'; if the answer is 'nonwhite,' classify it as 'black' (Ancheta, 1998). Other racial and ethnic communities are often either lumped together with either one end of the color spectrum or the other, or used as an excuse for whites to justify oppressive attitudes towards blacks (Lee, 1996; Okihiro, 1994). Because Chinese Americans are given relatively high social status, they are poised to play a unique role in the struggle for racial equity in this country (Okihiro, 1994). Even historically, Chinese American activists standing up to the white establishment, brought about landmark civil rights decisions. *Yick Wo vs. Hopkins* (1896) was the first anti-discrimination case decided by the U.S. Supreme Court in favor of the plaintiffs and is cited in seminal cases like *Brown v. Board*

*of Education of Topeka* (1954). Middle school is an ideal place to begin a dialogue on these issues because this age group has a strong sense of fairness and integrity and is searching for a productive social role (Erikson, 1968).

According to Delgado-Gaitan (1991), teachers rarely go about studying culture systematically. Instead they make assumptions based on observations of phenomena that strike them as being out of the norm. For example, the lack of participation in class discussions by Asian American children could result in a teacher concluding that Asians don't speak up. Interestingly, one of the descriptors my Chinese American students use to characterize newly-arrived Chinese is "noisy." Having more actual cultural knowledge leads to a wider range of interpretations of Chinese American students' silence including the possibility that the students are experiencing disequilibrium. Teachers may also draw inaccurate conclusions such as the notion that children who are well-behaved and academically successful children are unconflicted. Phelan, Davidson, & Yu's (1998) research among high school students refutes this assumption. William Ayers (2001) urges teachers to build bridges between the mainstream culture and the students' cultures, "Culture is an important window into a child, an essential part of any bridge's blueprint, and effective teachers must learn to be lifelong students of culture" (p.75).

An examination of Chinese American students' struggles to define themselves in a racialized society can make teachers of this population more conscious of their assumptions regarding their Asian American students. In addition, it is my hope that teachers who read this study will realize, as I did, that middle school students' keen interest in intercultural understanding can become a powerful incentive to develop analytical skills when the curriculum is built around multicultural literature.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### Introduction

Identity, basically, is a representation of the self within a social context. The process of identity negotiation involves associating and affiliating psychologically and/or physically with a group (Hall, 1996). These affiliations will vary according to the social context and position of the individual. Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (2001) define the term ethnic identity as “a feeling shared by individuals in a given group based on a sense of common origin, common beliefs and values, common goals, and shared destiny. Implied in this definition is the idea of cultural pluralism where dominant majorities and ethnic minorities must live together in a single nation” (p. 118). In other words, ethnic identity is about more than just an individual’s geographical roots prior to immigration. It also involves aspects of culture, status, and relationship to other groups within a society.

Since 1965, Asians have immigrated to the United States in substantial numbers. In 2007 they represented 4.3% of the total population, and that number is expected to double by 2020. Chinese Americans are still the largest ethnic group within this population. While many Asians are scattered throughout the country, Hawaii and California have the greatest numbers. In Hawaii, they comprise 42% of the total population and in California, 12%. Based on the 2000 census 45% of the second generation (including the 1.5-generation) is under the age of seventeen (Zhou, 2004). This has a direct effect on educational institutions. However, up until the last decade little research investigated the acculturation of Asian American children and adolescents (Yeh,

Ma, Madan-Bahel, Hunter, Jung, Kim, Akitaya, & Sasaki, 2005). The model minority stereotype may explain this situation.

While Gibson (1995) suggests that studying an academically successful group like Chinese Americans could yield some clues for helping less successful groups, she recognizes that Asian Americans have been miscategorized as the “model minority,” a stereotype which was created by the media in the mid-1960s at the height of the civil rights protests and persists to this day. Gibson calls for “more studies that look at Asian and non-Asian students, immigrant and nonimmigrant alike, and that investigate how cultural, structural, and situational variables interact to influence school performance” (p. 79).

Attaining an understanding of identity negotiation among Chinese Americans and its relevance to educators requires an interdisciplinary approach: history, sociology, psychology, and education all have an impact on the rate and degree of assimilation and acculturation in this community of color. Therefore studies from all four social science fields are discussed in this chapter. I review literature relating to the following topics:

- immigration and its impact on children
- national, ethnic, and racial identity formation
- educating the children of Asian immigrants

Because little literature focuses on Chinese Americans alone, I also cite studies involving other Asian ethnic participants, particularly Korean and Japanese Americans, that relate to Chinese American issues. I have found only two studies to date, Lee (1996) and Chen (2000), that incorporate data from middle school students. Therefore, the bulk

of the studies I examine deal with high school, college, and professional participants. However, many of the older respondents relate memories from their middle school years.

“We Are Sort of Outsiders”<sup>4</sup>

#### Studies on Second Generation Immigrants and Acculturation

Recent research on immigrants contradicts the findings of scholars who wrote 50 years ago about European immigrants (Portes, 1995). These studies show there is no simple linear process described by earlier theorists such as Park (1928) whereby an immigrant sheds her native culture as she immerses herself in the new culture (Gibson, 1995; Tuan, 1998). In fact, as Portes and Rumbaut (1996) assert, it is a complex and eclectic process, whereby the immigrant picks and chooses a cultural etiquette depending on the milieu and the situation. Gibson (1995) calls this process “acculturation,” which she distinguishes from assimilation. Not only is acculturation additive, one cultural practice added on to existing practices, but also implies a two way street: the host culture also feels the effects of the infusion of the immigrant’s culture.

Rate and type of assimilation are also dependent on the extent to which the immigrant is accepted by the receiving culture (Lowe, 1996; Portes & Rumbaut, 1996; Wu, 2002). “It is the cultural and phenotypic (physical) affinity of newcomers to ample segments of the host population that ensures a welcome reception” (Portes, 1995, p.74). The children of Chinese immigrants do not have this advantage. It is more likely that no matter what generation they are, they will be perceived and in fact perceive themselves, as perpetual foreigners (Wu, 2002). In addition, the international status of the country of origin and its political relationship to the U.S. will have an impact both on how second

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<sup>4</sup> Interview with Kyung (Lew, 2006, p. 82)



and later generations view themselves and how they are viewed by members of the dominant culture (Tuan, 1998).

LaFromboise, Coleman, and Gerton (1993) propose five models for transitioning between two cultures: assimilation, acculturation, alternation, multicultural, and fusion. In the assimilation model, a member of a minority culture is absorbed into the dominant or more desirable culture. The implication is that the new culture will gradually replace his or her original cultural identity. However, in the process, the individual will experience anxiety as traditional supports are lost and new assets have not been fully acquired. The authors define the second model, acculturation, differently than Gibson (1995). From their perspective, it is similar to the assimilation model in that it assumes the acquisition of the new culture means the loss of the original. In addition, this model implies a hierarchical relationship between the two cultures, and the process is a one way street, meaning the original culture has no impact or effect on the acquired culture. The one difference between these two models is that in the acculturation model, the individual will always be considered a member of a minority, even though competent in the new culture.

The third model discussed is the alternation model, which assumes that an individual can become fully competent in two cultures, alternating between them in different social contexts. In this model, no cultural hierarchy is posited with the assumption that both cultures will have an effect on each other. People who have adopted this model seem to experience higher self –esteem and less anxiety. The multicultural model builds on the alternation model. It assumes that people can function in a pluralistic social milieu, while maintaining one’s own cultural identity. Individuals from one culture

successfully work with members of another to achieve common social or economic goals. LaFromboise, Coleman, and Gerton (1993) question whether it is possible to maintain this model given that interaction over time will lead to fundamental changes in each culture as the individuals intermingle. This leads to the fifth and last model, the fusion model. This is a utopian version of the melting pot theory (Gans, 2004), proposing that over time coexisting cultures will fuse together to form a new hybrid culture. This model is similar to the assimilation model except that it assumes that the individual's psychological state will be indistinguishable from that of a member of the majority group. It also postulates a situation without a cultural hierarchy. The authors state there are few successful examples of this model and the psychological impact on members of the majority culture has not been studied.

Following their discussion of numerous studies conducted among minority populations, LaFromboise, Coleman, and Gerton (1993) conclude that the alteration model has potential to provide the healthiest and most realistic outcome for minority populations. While there are stresses involved, they assert that individuals who are grounded in their home culture can also adapt to a new culture without psychological damage. Those with networks and support systems in both cultural communities will have less problems being bicultural. They suggest that the route to achieving "bicultural efficacy" (p. 408) is dependent on two factors: self-awareness and the ability to analyze social behavior. Both of these factors can be broached in educational settings (Banks, 2004; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Phelan, Davidson, & Yu, 1998).

In the field of psychology, experiments have been conducted to study the acculturation process among Asian Americans. Hong, Morris, Chiu, and Benet-Martinez

(2000) argue that individuals can acquire and access more than one cultural system, even when the two cultures seem contradictory or conflicting. To prove that bicultural individuals operate under different cognitive and perceptual frames in a cultural context the researchers designed an experiment based on “priming.” Priming is a phenomenon wherein recent knowledge, being most accessible, will have an impact on an individual’s subsequent interpretation of events. To test this theory in a cultural context, high school students who grew up in a bicultural context (Hong Kong) were shown pictures of cultural icons and asked to write about them. Then they were shown a film and asked to interpret the actions of a character in the film. Those “primed” with pictures of a Chinese cultural icon, such as the Great Wall or superheroes, interpreted the characters’ actions most like Chinese monoculturals. Those shown American cultural icons interpreted the characters’ actions most like American monoculturals. Those shown neutral pictures of landscapes had a wider range of responses.

These findings (Hong, Morris, Chiu, & Benet-Martinez, 2000) seem to validate the hypothesis that individuals can adapt their perspective to match one of two contradictory cultures depending on the situation and environment: “The end result—thinking and behaving like a member of the host culture—is seen as a state, not a trait” (p.718). The authors conclude that immigrants have some control over their acculturation. Their findings are consistent with the alteration model (LaFranboise, et al, 1993) as well as qualitative studies on bicultural identity (Lew, 2006; Phelan, et al, 1998).

## The Yin and Yang of Racist Stereotyping:

### Yellow Peril and the Model Minority

Reviewing the literature on Asian Americans, I found references to the “model minority” stereotype in almost every scholarly study done on Asian Americans in the past three decades. It is beyond the scope of this study to review the concept and its history in depth. However, to the extent that it impacts the way Chinese Americans are both perceived by others, and measure themselves, it is relevant to both their identity formation and their relationship to school. Osajima (1988) suggests that the creation of the stereotype early in the Civil Rights era was a deliberate attempt by the state to contain erupting minority reaction to social injustice by insisting that *some* minorities didn’t need special help to achieve the American Dream: full participation in American society accompanied by wealth and prosperity. Asian Americans were considered “the best of the other” (Tuan, 1998, p.9). Confirming the prevalence of the stereotype, Schneider and Lee (1990) find that European American students have higher educational expectations for East Asians than East Asians have for themselves.

Since the phrase was coined, Asian American scholars have attempted to debunk the myths associated with the concept and set the record straight. Kim (2001) categorizes scholars’ various responses to the stereotype as denial, revision, and reconstruction. Denial research is an immediate reaction to the stereotype, but ineffective, Kim argues, in dispelling the persistent myth. The next wave of research, revision, attempts to respond to acts of discrimination in denying Asian Americans college placement. The problem Kim finds with this type of research is that it is often based on accepting and applying a

cultural deficit model to Asian Americans. In other words, the research tends to show that Asian Americans are in fact failing and need the same government assistance as other minority groups. Reconstruction research, in contrast, attempts to disclose the social stratification that keeps Asian Americans along with other minorities 'in their place.' In this type of research the concept of a monolithic Asian culture is questioned and each ethnicity is separated, "allowing the individual people to speak for themselves, about themselves" (p. 107).

Okihiro (1994) sees the model minority stereotype as a reframing of the yellow peril stereotype, "Like those pliant and persistent constructions of Asian culture, the concepts of the yellow peril and the model minority, although at an apparent disjunction, form a seamless continuum" (p.141). The same attributes, tireless dedication to work, patience, persistence in the face of adversity, cleverness, ultimately seen as a threat to white dominance, apply to both stereotypes.

Most references to the model minority assume a cultural explanation. Sue and Okazaki (1990) argue that cultural explanations do not stand up to scrutiny since Chinese in China do not exhibit the same scholarly achievement as those of the diaspora. They look to a structural explanation to account for differences in educational achievement between East Asians and other ethnicities. Since other avenues of social mobility are closed to Asians either because of language or discrimination, education is seen as the route to achieving the American dream. A. Louie (2004) attributes the educational achievement of Chinese American college students to a combination of their immigrant parents' optimism and pessimism. Optimism arises from the belief that education is an accessible avenue for success. Pessimism comes from the awareness that racism will be

an obstacle, causing parents to push their children to surpass the achievements of white students.

Sue and Okazaki (1990) cite “folk theories” as another possible explanation of Asian American parents’ investment in education. They assert that all ethnic groups value education, but other ethnic groups hold different theories for attaining success. Numbers of successful Asian American students reinforce this theory, but in reality, a glass ceiling is in effect. In fact, Asian Americans’ relatively high income is partly the result of concentrations of population in the three states with the highest cost of living, California, New York, and Hawaii (Sue & Okazaki, 1990).

Kibria (2002) finds that her respondents feel ambivalence towards the model minority stereotype. They perceive it as both a “passport to assimilation” (p. 132) and a “perpetuation of racist attitudes” (p. 132), making Asians the target of resentment and driving a wedge between Asians and other minorities. Some state they feel inadequate because they are not living up to model minority expectations. One respondent in Tuan’s study (1998) succinctly captures the problem with all stereotyping, “The frustration comes from trying so hard to be treated as a distinct individual and then confronting a thoughtless stereotype” (p. 145). Kibria contends that the solution lies in thinking critically about the stereotype, giving Asian Americans a means to affirm their individuality.

In her article on South East Asian high school students, Asher (2001) concludes that the model minority label becomes an internalized standard for her participants. The expectations for educational and financial success leads them to marginalize and limit themselves, rather than challenge the stereotype, just as African Americans in the 1950s

adopted white standards such as ‘good’ hair being straight or wavy as opposed to tight curls (X, 1999). Asher finds that comparatively few Asians attempt to penetrate such fields as journalism or the arts despite their interest in those areas. Instead they put their energy into “safe” fields such as medicine or business, based on both parents’ and their own expectations for acceptance and success.

Besides the model minority stereotype, other stereotypes also persist which are often contradictory (Dhingra, 2003). For example, Asian American females are seen as exotic, hypersexual, manipulative, as well as submissive drudges. Asian American males are seen as slyly threatening as well as emasculated and nerdy. While the male stereotypes are contiguous with the model minority, the female stereotypes describe a different kind of status within the social order. A college student writes, “White males see Asian women as exotic sexual objects to be claimed and conquered” (Hirashima, 2007, p. 104).

Asian males may be bullied in school because of their feminized stereotype (Lei, 2001). In response they may adopt a style of dress and self-representation associated with the African American hip hop movement. While this response may earn them freedom from harassment by other students, it may also earn them an association with gangs and other negative stereotypes in the minds of school personnel. Either way they remain marginalized in terms of the dominant culture.

Kim and Yeh (2002) cite studies that show Asian Americans reported more symptoms of depression, withdrawal, and other social problems despite their academic success and lack of delinquent behaviors. They also report more dissatisfaction with their social support. Many Asian Americans respond to racist stereotypes by becoming

passive—not sticking out, behaving well, acquiescing, being better than ‘they’ are. However, Tuan (1998) argues, these coping strategies can inhibit success since they internalize stress and stifle agency, the taking control of one’s destiny.

“I rake through the pit of my heart  
Only to see one solitary word:  
Me”<sup>5</sup>

“I think it's more of me being who I am,  
rather than the asian-ness [sic] haha.”<sup>6</sup>

### Identity Studies

In 2005 I conducted a brief experiment in my sixth grade class following a discussion about membership in two cultures. I chose two students to come to the front of the room and face the class. One, Jeff, had red hair, blue eyes, and freckled pale skin. He had immigrated with his family when he was six years old and self-identified as Russian. A linguistically gifted child, he was already articulate in his native language when he enrolled in an American school. The experience of having to learn a new language from the beginning created psychological stress and disorientation.<sup>7</sup> Although by the age of 11 he had achieved full bilingualism and spoke unaccented English, his writing about his earlier struggles revealed that the scars were still present.

The other student, Kelsey, had pale skin, dark brown almond-shaped eyes with an epicanthic fold, and long, straight black hair. She was a third generation American who was ambivalent about her identity. “Chinese American,” “Asian,” “Asian American” were phrases she used interchangeably. Both her parents were second generation Chinese Americans whose parents had emigrated from Guangdong. Although her grandparents

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<sup>5</sup> Excerpt from a poem on identity by a Chinese American eighth grade student, 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Email from a participant, 2007

<sup>7</sup> Personal communication, 2005.



spoke Cantonese at home, neither parent had studied the language and did not consider him or herself bilingual. This student spoke no Cantonese. I asked the class to point to the American. Without hesitation, all but two students pointed to the “Russian” child. The other two students used both hands to point to both. Significantly, Jeff pointed to Kelsey, because he self-identifies as Russian and looked surprised when he saw so many fingers pointed at him.

Several themes emerge from this story: achieved identity vs. ascribed identity, American vs. foreign, and the salience of race as defined by skin color and phenotype in American society. While Jeff does not see himself as American, others ascribe American identity to him because of his resemblance to the phenotype of members of the dominant culture. Many American-born Chinese ethnics have internalized the foreignness ascribed to them (Kibria, 2002; Lowe, 1996). Both members of the dominant culture and immigrants of color tend to associate the term American with Europeans or whites (Frankenberg, 1993). These themes are addressed in studies done on identity among Chinese Americans in the last two decades, which I discuss below.

Kibria (2002) studies identity formation among Chinese Americans and Korean Americans, conducting in-depth interviews with 64 second-generation adults on their experiences growing up in two cultures in the 1980s and 90s. While the majority of her interviews are from middle class professionals, their backgrounds are more economically diverse, and therefore representative of a larger group. Her research explores the relevance of the ethnic model of assimilation (Gordon, 1964) to the identity of second generation Chinese and Korean Americans. She investigates how race affects

acculturation and how these ethnic Americans deal with the challenges presented by the salience of racial categorization in their identity negotiation.

Kibria (2002) concludes that the second generation does not feel comfortable in either the cultural milieu of their parents nor mainstream American culture: “Second generation represents a high point of tension” (p. 27). Asher (2001) also finds that Asian Indian Americans “experience interracial, interethnic, and intercultural dissonance and tensions” (p. 61) both at school and at home. At school they have to assert themselves as Asian and at home as American.

In addition, because of the ease of travel in this century, the second-generation often has to negotiate transnational identities (Asher, 2001; Kibria, 2002). In the U.S. they are seen as foreigners and in China they are derogatorily termed “hollow bamboo,” neither one thing nor another (Tuan, 1998). To further complicate matters, Choe (1999) points out that changes in the homeland culture are not always incorporated into the immigrant’s culture, “The cultural values and practices of ...immigrants tend to remain stagnant despite the transnational flow of information” (pg. 219). This means that the culture transmitted by parents is not necessarily the same as the evolving culture of the country of origin, heightening the second generation’s sense of disconnection.

Racialization plays a large part in Asian American identity formation, and is “in sharp contrast to the symbolic ethnicity of white ethnicities, for racial minorities racial identity powerfully masks and constrains the process of defining their ethnic affiliations” (Kibria, 2002, p. 69). Reflecting on one respondent’s description of his childhood experience, Kibria writes “[L]ooking Asian’ was a barrier to normalcy...to be normal was to be white” (p. 31). Even though most scholars maintain that race and ethnicity are

mutually exclusive categories (the basis of race is physical appearance, the basis of ethnicity is behavior and geographical origins), in everyday life race and ethnicity are often conflated (Omi & Winant, 1994; Tuan, 1998).

One example is the actor, Daniel Dae Kim, a Korean American who plays a Korean national on the popular T.V. show *Lost*. Even though his character reflects his ethnicity and not his nationality, he says in an interview that previously he mainly played Chinese characters (<http://www.asiasource.org/arts/danieldaekim.cfm>). Of course, white actors, as well, are frequently cast as in roles as Europeans whose ethnicities don't necessarily reflect their own. The difference is that in everyday life, ethnicity is not salient for white Americans in the same way as for Americans of color (Kibria, 2002; Tuan, 1998; Waters, 1990). It is also somewhat ironic that in 2007 two of the three characters on commercial television specifically identified as Koreans are playing non-English speaking foreigners. Yunjin Kim, who plays Dae's wife, is also a 1.5 generation-American. The third Korean actor, Sandra Oh, born in Canada of Korean ancestry, plays a character with the surname Yang, which could be either Chinese or Korean. Except for the information that her character's stepfather is a Jewish doctor, her ethnic and cultural background is not referenced on the show.

Tuan's (1998) study of Asian identity with 95 third and fourth generation middle class Americans of Japanese and Chinese ancestry demonstrates similarities between second generation and higher generation Asian Americans in terms of experiences and attitudes. Being mistaken for a foreigner is a common thread, but higher generations' corresponding exasperation is more intense since both parents and, in some cases, grandparents were U.S. natives. Tuan uses the MSNBC headline reporting of the results

of the 1998 Olympic figure skating, “American Beats Out Kwan,” to underscore the challenges to Asian American assimilation in the U.S. For Tuan, the racialization process is different for Asians than for Blacks because their marginalization is compounded by the fact that they are immigrants. Not only are they “non-white,” but perceived as non-native as well. “Most of our respondents have been asked the question ‘where are you from?’ at some point in their lives. All have learned that the question really being asked is ‘what is your ancestral homeland?’” (p.141). Omi and Winant (1994) argue that assuming there will be structural assimilation is unwarranted in the case of racial minorities, “whose distinctiveness from the white majority is often not appreciably altered by the adoption of the norms and values of the white majority” (p. 21).

Playing the ethnic game is the way Tuan categorizes her respondents’ refusal to acknowledge this underlying, unspoken meaning. Her respondents explain that they continue to give American locations in response to this query until the questioner either asks the ‘real’ question or gives up. While some allow that the questions are often being asked without racist motives, they resent the implication that they are not American. One sophomore interviewed in Lew’s (2006) study of Korean American high school students in New York City complains that “people” at a party asked the Korean Americans where they were from, but didn’t ask her white friends. She says, “‘cause my friends, you know, also have backgrounds too, you know, not just me” (p. 81). Dhingra (2003) finds in his study on second generation Asian Americans that they view whites as immigrants just like themselves, at the same time recognizing that whites are perceived to be American while they are not.

Kibria's (2002) findings confirm Waters' (1990) conclusion in her study of ethnic identification among Americans of European ancestry that people of color in the U.S., in contrast to whites do not have the ability to opt out. Their experiences indicate that the 'ethnic options' Waters refers to in relation to European Americans are personal but not public for Asian Americans. How they choose to identify is not considered a private affair. Even language is not a "disidentifier." Hearing an Asian American speak fluent, unaccented English, white Americans are just as likely to assume they are talking to a foreigner of exceptional language ability as they are to assume they are talking to a native speaker.

Kibria (2002) writes, "In sharp contrast to the symbolic ethnicity of white ethnicities, for racial minorities racial identity powerfully masks and constrains the process of defining their ethnic affiliations" (p. 69). This situation leads to resentment toward recent Asian immigrants and the perception that the small measure of acceptance Asian Americans have attained is being spoiled by the newly-arrived. Asian immigration doubled between 1980 and 1990, which may account for the intensification of these ambivalent feelings (Zhou, 2004). Both Kibria's informants and my own students use the term FOB (Fresh Off the Boat) to refer to the newly-arrived. My students recognize the pejorative nature of the descriptor but use it anyway<sup>8</sup>.

Asian Americans interviewed are well aware that one individual can stand for the whole group. Tuan writes, "That the possible wrongdoing of a handful of Asian and Asian Americans can cast a shadow over all...is an all too familiar scenario" (p. 153). Tuan's interviews show that Chinese and Korean Americans feel constrained by the

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<sup>8</sup> personal communication

conflation of racial categories with national and ethnic categories. Although white Americans do demonstrate some recognition of differences between Asian ethnicities, many respondents experience being mistaken for a member of a different Asian ethnicity. One of the ways her respondents deal with pan-Asian ascription is to make ethnic ‘We all look alike’ jokes. However, informants recognize the racial nature of the ascription, causing ambivalence about disidentifying.

In a quantitative study conducted among second generation Chinese American children and adolescents in Chicago and the San Francisco Bay Area using the Suinn-Lew Asian Self Identity Acculturation Test (SL-ASIA), Chen (2000) finds that while his second generation participants fall into the bicultural or Americanized categories as measured by communication skills, interactions, and cultural preferences (music, movies, and other media), they self-identify as Chinese or Chinese American rather than American. Chen attributes this discrepancy to marginalization.

Discussion with my own students confirms this interpretation. A survey I gave my students in 2006 asked the questions “Have you ever wanted to be a different race? If so, which one?” Over half of my Chinese American students answered, “Yes, white.” In response to the question, “Has a European American ever told you he or she wanted to be Chinese?” one student responded, “Who would ever want to be Chinese?”<sup>9</sup>

Garcia and Hurtado (1995) in their review of research on the development of racial and ethnic identity in children find that children’s awareness of race and ethnicity develops as early as age four. Their attitudes toward other races and ethnicities seem to depend in large part on “both the attitudes of their adult caregivers and on the perceived

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<sup>9</sup> personal conversation, 2005.

power and wealth of their own ethnic group” (p. 177). In other words, the children are aware of the relative status of their racial and ethnic group, which in turn has an impact on their identity formation. A Korean American respondent’s description of the typical American family in Lew (2006) is remarkably similar to the family in the notorious elementary school primer of the 1940s and 50s, *Dick and Jane*, despite many years of including multicultural literature in textbooks:

When you imagine American, it’s like that family with a good-looking father and a good-looking wife and live in a good place. They lead a very good life. Kids are very well off, they get good grades, there is a baby. There is a guy, a girl, and a baby. They live in Long Island or somewhere with their white picket fence. They really lead a good life...the White people...the White family (p.82).

Another theme threaded throughout these studies is the difference between those who grow up in or with access to their ethnic community and those who grow up in white communities. Those without the support of a strong ethnic community tend to reject their heritage and/or to lead double lives. They interact one way at home and a very different way at school and in the community. Those who grow up in ethnic communities are more comfortable with their heritage culture. However, this may also lead to a negative outcome.

Yeh and Hwang (2000) find heightened feelings of stress and isolation in their case study of a Japanese American college sophomore attending a predominantly European American college. Having attended a high school with a majority Asian population, her first immersion in white society causes her to question her identity. They emphasize the importance of sociocultural factors like geographic location in developing and shaping a sense of self. Kibria (2002) finds that some respondents, especially among those who grow up in predominantly European American environments, resist

identification with an ethnic group at all (2002). She concludes that their resistance to “ethnonationalism,” being identified by a conflation of ordinary ethnicity and nation, is a response to the racism exhibited by members of the dominant culture and mainstream media. Chen (2000) finds that second generation Chinese Americans who grow up in Chicago where mainstream American culture predominates are more likely to choose the designation Chinese American, whereas those in the Bay Area, where a multicultural outlook is more prevalent, and Chinese culture is more accepted, choose the Chinese designation.

Interviews with Korean American high school students (Lew, 2006) and Chinese American college students in New York City (A. Louie, 2004) also show that growing up in a white suburban environment makes an adolescent’s association with an ethnic group more difficult and complex while ethnic communities for the most part reinforce that association. Even language maintenance is a function of environment. A. Louie (2004) notes that among lower class Chinese Americans living in urban ethnic enclaves, peers ensure that Chinese is not forgotten. Since parents are working long hours, they have little time to engage in conversation with their children, but peer groups communicate with each other in a creole mixing English and Chinese.

Kibria’s (2002) study seeks to determine whether there are more similarities than differences between Korean and Chinese Americans in terms of their identity formation. She finds that the similarities far outweigh the differences. This finding begs the question, What are the salient aspects of Chinese American culture?

Several years ago I brought a small group of Chinese American students together to discuss what makes Chinese culture unique. During the discussion I noticed that when



referring to Chinese people, my students consistently used the pronoun “they” instead of “we.” When I inquired who “they” were; one girl exclaimed, “Our parents!” while the others nodded assent. It is no wonder then that the family is a key theme in many identity studies (Garrod & Kilkenny, 2007; Kibria, 2002a; Kibria 2002b; Min & Kim, 2002; Tuan 1998; Zhou & Lee, 2004). In fact, some respondents are hard pressed to distinguish between their own family culture and a larger cultural context. One college student explains, “To me, Chinese was everything bad about living with my father” (Takeshita, 2007, p. 261). Others attribute their success to their family’s inculcation of cultural values (Lew, 2006; Kibria, 2002; Min & Kim, 2002).

Min and Kim (2002) solicited and analyzed 15 essays from Asian American second and 1.5 generation professionals on the topics of retention of culture, networking through the ethnic community, and ethnic identity. They find that many of their East Asian respondents identify the following common cultural practices inculcated in the family: esteem for elders, a work ethic, and an emphasis on educational achievement. The respondents found that they could speak about these issues easily with other Asian ethnics who shared the same values or exposure to those values. Their immigrant parents also experienced similar problems: long work hours, decline in status, discrimination, and language issues that reverberated in the family.

Asher’s (2001) study of Asian Indian Americans confirms this finding. Her respondents commented that non-Asian peers have no problems saying “no” to their parents, which does not happen among Asian peers, “ A lot of times, they [parents] tell you to do something and you do it. You don’t say, ‘Why?’ You just do it—because, well, they are your parents” (p.62). The respondent goes on to describe the astonishment this

behavior evokes among his non-Asian friends. Both Min and Kim (2002) and A. Louie (2004) note that respondents often mention feeling obligated to repay their parents for the sacrifices or downward mobility they endure.

While second-generation respondents clearly understand the cultural nature of their parents' child-rearing practices, other cultural practices like holidays and celebrations have become rituals devoid of spiritual meaning, followed only if they do not conflict with their American lifestyle (A. Louie, 2004; Tuan, 1998). Louie attributes this to the lack of communication between working class parents and children. Working class parents rarely have time to share the importance of these rituals with their children; most middle class parents, on the other hand, are more focused on assimilation.

Second generation children find their parents stricter, stiffer, and more focused on the acquisition of material wealth than the parents of European American classmates. They do not play with their children and discourage creativity (Lew, 2006; A. Louie, 2004; Min & Kim, 2002; Zhou & Lee, 2004). Lew (2006) finds that her respondents prefer to associate with other second generation Asians because their family issues are similar. One respondent states:

Just the way you obey your parents...even the way you talk to your elders is different from the way Caucasians talk to their parents. I guess there is a lot of strictness with them. It's easier to relate to Koreans or Asians as friends than other races. My friends, from what they tell me, it seems to me similar between Koreans and Chinese and other Asians (p. 67).

Another respondent uses her peer network as a reality check for her parents' attitudes and expectations, "As long as she [Susan's mother] is like other mothers...I would listen, I would have no questions about it, 'cause I would know that other Korean parents are like that so what can I expect?" (p. 38-39).

The third and fourth generation respondents Tuan (1998) interviewed mention more family recreational activities. However, these activities, while they are culturally American, often take place with co-ethnics, like playing on a team of co-ethnics. When possible, second-generation parents still rely on bonds with the ethnic community to ensure their offspring are supported and comfortable in their identity as Asian Americans (Tuan, 1998). A. Louie (2004), in her study of differences between second-generation college students who attend private university versus an urban commuter school finds that upper middle class parents seek out activities with co-ethnic groups to give their children support and validation. Although they are immigrants themselves, many were educated in the U.S. and are at a stage of acculturation closer to second-generation parents than first generation parents.

Most of the middle class second-generation Korean American students Lew (2006) studies are members of a co-ethnic community from which they derive much of their support. Those students whose parents are not part of that community tend to be excluded from peer alliances as well, either because they have lower socioeconomic status or because they are more assimilated into mainstream American culture. One girl who speaks no Korean, lives in a white suburb, and whose parents are fully bilingual, says, “[My dad] knows that in order to succeed, you have to assimilate. So, being too much involved in the Korean community may be bad” (p.75). Some parents in white suburban areas refuse to teach their children to speak Chinese because they feel it will limit their ability to communicate well in English (A. Louie, 2004). Chinese is reserved as a secret language between parents when they do not want their children to understand

them. Other parents send their children to Chinese school, which the majority resent at the time. Later, as college students, they regret not having learned the language.

Parents impart pride in the cultural heritage particularly in response to racially motivated incidents (Kibria, 2002; Lew, 2006; Mickelson, Okazaki, & Zheng, 1995). Mixed messages from parents represent racism as both “intractable and possible to overcome” (Kibria, 2002, p. 61). Exclusionary treatment by the dominant culture causes initiates parents’ identity messages. The second generation is often resistant to these messages, at the same time understanding where they came from (Kibria, 2002).

While second-generation children confront challenging circumstances, some repercussions are positive (Lew, 2006). When parents speak little English and do not understand American systems, middle class second-generation Korean American high school students form sophisticated peer networks, which help them negotiate institutional hurdles. Erikson (1968) writes that adolescence is a period of “synthesis of childhood ‘selves,’ which contain the history of the society inculcated through the parents’ (and, I would add, schools) upbringing and a new identity which emerges through an intellectual engagement with society” (p. 87). Because immigrant parents’ capability for support is limited, the children begin their intellectual engagement with society earlier. As long as they have the financial backing of their parents and access to a strong peer network, the increased responsibility may help them develop a positive identity (Lew, 2006).

#### Made in America: Pan-Asian Ethnicity

Since the 1960s, a number of Asian Americans have been seeking to form a pan-Asian coalition, in response to racialization by the dominant culture (Espiritu, 1992) which, they believe, could help them achieve political parity (Espiritu, 1992; Lowe,

1996). In his book on Asian Americans in relation to citizenship, Ancheta (1998) discusses categorization. ‘Asian,’ he asserts, is not really a racial definition but a response to being ‘foreign’ because the category includes South Asians who are phenotypically different. It also includes Southeast Asians who have similar phenotypes but darker skin than East Asians. Lowe (1996) also addresses the unique situation that arises from racialization:

The making of Asian American culture includes practices that are partly inherited, partly modified, as well as partly invented; Asian American culture also includes practices that emerge in relation to the dominant representations that deny or subordinate Asian and Asian American culture as “other” (p. 65).

Kibria (2002) foresees a pan-Asian group emerging in response to the racialization of ethnicity in the U.S., a process that she terms ethnogenesis. However, some of her findings seem to belie the achievement of this stage in the near future. Attitudes towards affiliation with other Asian ethnicities or even co-ethnic affiliations are varied and ambivalent (Garrod & Kilkenny, 2007; Hsu, 2000; Kibria, 2002; Lew, 2006; Phelan, Davidson, & Yu, 1998; Tuan, 1998).

Among Kibria’s (2002) respondents there was much resentment towards intra-Asian affinity, but this often coexisted with the feeling that people of Asian heritage did in fact have a special affinity. In her chapter focusing on informants attending college, the researcher finds more resistance than acceptance of a political approach to pan-Asian identity.

Some respondents (Kibria, 2002) say they feel their individuality being stifled by the categorization and an expectation to conform to the culture adopted by campus political organizations. They complain that pan-Asian or even ethnic organizations are

too focused on politics, and the identity they promote feels artificial. While some mentioned feeling a special bond with other Asians, especially those who were racially similar (of Korean, Japanese, or Chinese ancestry), others feel ethnicity is more important, and a third group rejects identification with both ethnicity and race. One Korean American respondent says, “I mean I had acquaintances in college who were Chinese, that kind of thing. I can’t say I had more in common with them than whites or blacks or whatever. It’s a mistake to think there’s any real bond going on there.” (p. 123).

Other respondents find both ethnic and racial identity limiting. The same girl quoted earlier in Lew’s (2006) study who feels assimilation is the recipe for success says, “I am not boastful about my race, and I don’t think I should be judged by what I am but who I am. You shouldn’t be exactly alike and conform” (p. 74). A college student says:

“The Asian group, they would give me a hard time—‘Hey why aren’t you hanging out with us? Are you a banana?’ My [friends] would kid around about it and ask me why I wasn’t hanging out with the Asians. They were joking, they knew I wouldn’t fit in with the Asians (Kibria, 2002, p.126).

However, most acknowledge that structural factors such as government designations and the inability of white Americans to distinguish between Asian ethnics, a shared history of exclusion (Chan & Hune, 1995; Espiritu, 1992; Lowe, 1996; Wu, 2002) as well as intra-ethnic marriage (Kibria, 2002) may make pan-Asian identity more viable in the future. Zhou and Lee (2004) write, “Asian American youth may also find it more difficult to retain a strictly ethnic identity when outsiders identify them pan-ethnically as Asians” (p.21).

In his essay, Kenneth Lee (2007), a college student of Burmese and Chinese ancestry, describes his need to “come to terms” with identity ascription, “I was closing myself off, deluding myself, lost in a melting pot that had no meaning...I was shutting

myself off from a people with whom I shared a bond” (p. 88). He writes of an incident with a white friend when a group of Asian Americans walked by. The friend said, “There goes the Asian invasion.” Turning to Lee he added, “Don’t worry, man, you’re different...” Lee reflects, “By labeling me as different, Jim validated the one thing that I desired the most: individuality” (p.67). But, Lee admits, the racist overtones devalued the compliment.

Another emerging trend is to identify with other racial groups. Okihiro (1994) argues that there is an historical bond between blacks and Asians vis-à-vis white oppression. He suggests coalitions that go beyond ethnonational or racial alliances and encompass all people of color. In Min and Kim’s (2002) study of Asian professionals, several recall having African American role models because there was little mention of Asian American history in their education. In her essay, a Chinese American college student (A. Lee, 2007) writes that she identifies with the African American students because they had an inner city childhood in common. However, most Asians tend to align themselves with white hegemony in opposition to identification with people of color (Ancheta, 1998).

One positive aspect of identity ascription is the notion that having a culture is more interesting and rewarding than having no culture, which is the way many dominant culture whites view themselves. Several informants in Frankenberg’s (1993) study of white women also express this view, describing themselves as existing without culture and envying those they associate with a distinct culture. However, the desire for uniqueness is counterbalanced by the desire to blend in (Tuan, 1998). While having culture provides ethnic identity capital, uniqueness and expertise in a certain area, the

visibility is often as much of a burden as a reward (Kibria, 2002b, Tuan 1998). Rosaldo (1989) asserts that having culture in the U.S. is in inverse relationship to having power, “Full citizenship and cultural visibility appear to be inversely related. Full citizens lack culture and those most culturally endowed lack citizenship” (p.198).

McIntosh’s (1990) discussion of white privilege, in which she lists and describes the various ways white Americans enjoy opportunities and options closed to people of color, validates this notion. Gibson (1995) defines minority as, “A group occupying a subordinate position in a multiethnic society, suffering from the disabilities of prejudice and discrimination, and maintaining a separate group identity” (p. 80). In the hegemonic culture, white is taken for normal, i.e., having no culture, and all others must adjust to the extent that they can or are allowed to. In general, the literature indicates that acceptance of pan-Asian identity, while not yet predominant, is growing. More Asian Americans realize interethnic coalitions have more power to confront common problems with racism and discrimination.

“If I don’t see color, I’m not a racist” (Howard, 1999)

#### The Impact of Schools on Immigrants of Color

Gibson (1995) writes that students who do well have a “*facilitative orientation to schooling*” (her italics, p.82). In other words, they believe education will lead to a better life. One parent in her study continually reminds his child, “The fields are waiting” (p.82). East Asian parents stress effort and persistence over intelligence and talent (Lew, 2006; Sue & Okazaki, 1990). They instill in their children a respect for teachers and the belief that the family’s reputation “rests on their shoulders” (Gibson, 1995, p. 83). While



this attitude leads to academic achievement, it comes at a cost: a high incidence of stress and depression (Kim & Yeh, 2002).

Case studies with high school students from diverse cultural backgrounds highlight the importance of affective elements in education (Phelan, et al, 1998). They use the terms “borders” and “boundaries” to distinguish types of interpersonal relationships in schools. Borders are akin to barriers, where knowledge, skills, and behaviors in one domain (home or school) are more highly valued and rewarded than those in the other. These borders separate students from adults and peers. Borders can be negotiated but at high psychic cost. Boundaries are negotiable spaces that allow individuality to exist without isolation or exclusion. They assert that teachers’ interest in and validation of students’ unique background experiences may transform cultural borders into boundaries.

Students use a variety of coping strategies when there is a mismatch between home and school environments. Phelan, et al (1998) categorize these as rejection, adaptation, and transculturation. Either they reject home culture, language (internalized oppression—I’m not as good as they are and must try to be like them), or adapt to both environments (code and style switching), or exercise eclecticism regarding aspects of each culture to adapt or reject, not trying to fit into any one group (transculturation).

Pedagogical methods, relationships, teacher attitudes, and classroom environments all have an impact on students’ ability to form meaningful connections with adults. This in turn affects student achievement, “Students in our study confirm what other researchers report—that caring teachers are critical to creating bridges between students and adults” (Phelan, et al, 1998, p. 197).

Phelan et al (1998) contend that classrooms are also sites where students can learn how to deal with the diverse cultures they will encounter in their adult life:

Particularly necessary are strategies that enable students to articulate and examine their own presuppositions about other social and cultural groups in a context that makes explicit unequal power relationships in the classroom, the school, and larger society (p.203).

Gary Howard (1999) agrees, “If we do not face dominance, we may be predisposed to perpetuate it” (p. 26). However, Ladson-Billings (1999) cautions that accomplishing this goal will not be so easy. Multicultural education, she concludes, can degenerate into singing ethnic songs and eating ethnic foods, instead of examining the contradictions between the rhetoric of a pluralistic society and the real lives of human beings in this country. She laments that too often what stands for multicultural education is merely superficial celebrations of diversity. Although the national rhetoric gives lip service to the multiculturalism of our nation, in fact, in the national consciousness Americans, except for white Europeans, are marked and schools perpetuate this perception. We celebrate Black History Month, Asian History Month, Latino History Month, but no European History Month, This perspective uses the rationale that European culture is the foundation on which this country is built, so there is no reason to highlight it (Ladson-Billings, 1999).

Regarding inclusion and race in schools, Pollock (2004), in her study on talking about race at a San Francisco high school, writes, “...people at Columbus seemed socialized to frame one another daily as race group members; they also tended to resist this very socialization” (p. 44). To counteract this ambivalence and confusion, Howard (1999) calls on teachers to “open ourselves and our students to the possibility of change” by allowing “the deeper lessons of history to be learned” (p. 81). In this way we may

prepare our students be prepared to take on the challenges of reconciling pluralism and the unity necessary for participatory democracy.

Fell-Eisenkraft's (2006) study with eighth graders in a New York City Chinatown middle school highlights the disconnection between teachers' perceptions of students of different cultural backgrounds and the students' own perceptions of themselves. When the teacher-researcher brought up students' desires to talk about 9/11, the largely European American faculty became defensive and protested that students did not talk and did not want to talk. One teacher said, "They're just quiet when it comes to talking about issues—any issues" (p.70). The study shows that middle school students may be aware of the critical issues facing their community such as marginalization, since the participants comment on the lack of reporting in the mainstream press on the impact of 9/11 on Chinatown, a community immediately adjacent to the disaster site, and their consistent references to 'Americans' as 'they' rather than 'we'.

However, Fell-Eisenkraft's (2006) findings also demonstrate how assumptions teachers make about students whose backgrounds are different from theirs may lead them to pass up on curriculum that emphasizes critical thinking or student empowerment. Just because a student is quiet and well-behaved in school does not necessarily mean that he or she does not have a tumultuous life outside of school; Asian American gangs are not uncommon in urban environments (Pang, & Cheng, 1998).

Danling Fu (1995), a Chinese American teacher and researcher who learned English as a second language, writes, "In the Chinese culture we tell our children, 'you should not speak up if you are not a hundred percent sure of what you are going to say.' So we are always careful of what we say because we are very conscious of our image to

others” (p. 198). However, she goes on to contend that even though the expectation of speaking out might be incongruent with cultural practices, students see value in this kind of learning and need to be given opportunities and encouragement to overcome their discomfort. She believes that a teacher’s sharing of personal stories is the best way to help students break out of their silence. Fell-Eisenkraft (2006) recommends giving students opportunities to journal, discuss in small groups or partners, or use alternative forms of expression, like the arts, to help quiet students share their thoughts and grow into public speaking. Pang (2001) cautions, “If Asian American students are not being consistently invited into class discussions, they may feel reticent about participating because of strong respect for authority” (p. 415).

In Park’s (2006) study of learning styles which included 98 Chinese American secondary students she finds Chinese American students show high preferences for kinesthetic learning, as do all other students in her study. They also show higher preference for visual learning than Anglo students who showed negative preference. Preference for auditory learning did not correlate with ethnicity. Chinese American students showed negative preference for group learning, but the author asserts this could be a function of lack of familiarity with group activities, since her participants were all coming from Chinese education systems.

One limitation of Park’s (2006) study is the students were not asked to comment on why they disliked small group learning. Surveys and reflections I have done with my second generation Chinese American students show that the vast majority prefer group activities. That may be due to the fact that I base a student’s grades predominantly on the individual’s contribution to the group, rather than giving a group score. This addresses

the worry that dysfunctional group members may interfere with one's evaluation, a problem cited in most objections to group work. Park does not tell us how the issue of grading was addressed.

Nelson-Barber (2001) finds that indigenous teachers in the Marshall Islands succeed with students by incorporating their cultural knowledge into both curriculum and pedagogy. She suggests that inclusive strategies like these help students bridge cultures. Furthermore, she contends that teachers must learn different cultural communication styles to fully engage students.

Gibson (1995) finds in her research on California Sikhs that many of these students remain in ESL classes throughout high school, receiving good grades, but little instruction. Therefore, before we draw conclusions about the effect of Chinese culture on school achievement, we need to study the roles Chinese Americans play in school, how they are educated, and to what kind of standards they are held. Even though Chinese Americans have more education, they still earn less than European Americans as a group (Kibria, 2002; Tuan 1998; Zhou, 2004). This may either point to the salience of race as a factor in employment, or to the possibility that even though students are successful in school, they may not be receiving the kind of education that translates into high paying jobs.

### Multicultural Literature

Goodwin (2003) writes that healthy identity formation among students of color involves inclusion in the curriculum. She writes:

School apparently is complicit in Asian American marginality by failing to acknowledge their existence. Self-pride remains under-developed and self-image suffers from distortion when the self is not visible, neither to the self or others. (2003, pp. 12-13).

The adults she interviews remember few instances during their schooling when teachers or texts referenced Asians or Asian Americans. One woman says, poignantly, the curriculum included “nothing that helped me understand myself” (Goodwin, 2003, p.12). One of my own high achieving students confided to me, “I only got interested when we started studying China.”<sup>10</sup> While students may be successful, they may not be engaged until school provides not only “windows,” but “mirrors” as well (Galda, 1998, p. 4).

Incorporating a variety of multicultural literature in the curriculum partially addresses this problem. It offsets the popular media images that make Asian Americans feel marginalized, and cause non-Asians to discount their legitimacy and status as Americans (Goodwin, 2003). According to Cai (2002), the term multicultural literature refers to “a group of works used to break the monopoly of the mainstream culture and make the curriculum pluralistic” (p. 4). In other words a piece of literature may be representative of only one culture but still be “multicultural” in that it disrupts the hegemony of Eurocentric curriculum. In addition, literature representing minority Americans is intrinsically multicultural because it deals with the interaction between two cultures, the dominant and the “dominated” (Cai, 2002). This is true even if the dominant culture is not specifically mentioned because Americans of color have a double consciousness (DuBois, 1968), an awareness not only of their own achieved identities, but also of their ascribed identities vis-à-vis the dominant society (Young, 1998). Therefore, literature involving Asian Americans implicitly references European American culture.

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<sup>10</sup> Personal communication, 2005.

For Cai (2002), multicultural literature is not only about inclusion, but also about the struggle for social justice and equity in the face of the existing power structure. He contends, “Its goal is not just to understand, accept, and appreciate cultural differences, but to ultimately transform the existing social order in order to ensure greater voice and authority to the marginalized cultures” (p. 7). Cai discusses two types of books that address the self-esteem of Asian Americans in the classroom. One category is culturally neutral. These books are useful because while their characters are underrepresented minorities, they deal with universal themes. By portraying Asian characters as similar to others, they address the characterization of Asian Americans as “other” (Goodwin, 2003; Kibria, 2002; Tuan, 1998, Wu, 2002).

Another category, culturally specific books, illustrates the uniqueness of a particular culture. These books are more likely to address the feelings of exceptionalism and difference expressed by respondents in Asian American identity research (Kibria, 2002; Kim, 2001; Lew, 2006, Tuan, 1998), whether they are cultural differences or experiences of marginalization and exclusion (Cai, 2002). Including these books is essential for promoting self-understanding. “These books give back to parallel cultures their histories and cultural identities” (Cai, 2002, p. 130). However, he qualifies his assertion by saying that just because a student is a member of a culture doesn’t mean that he or she has enough cultural knowledge to make sense of a particular book. As we have seen with individuals whose families prioritize assimilation (Kim, 2001; Lew, 2006), their upbringing may not include a sufficient amount of background information to give them easy access to culturally specific literature. Probably the most relevant point Cai

(2002) makes in relation to identity development is that teachers can use multicultural literature to cross cultural borders and achieve understanding of their students' cultures.

An Oakland, California teacher, Deborah Juarez (1999) conducted a research study in her eighth grade English class on the effects of using multicultural literature to change student attitudes towards marginalized cultures in the United States. She writes, "Through the use of multicultural literature, I provided alternate views of American thought and validated the cultural experience of my students" (p. 125). Before presenting her unit on immigration she analyzed student writing and found that her Asian students had little information on Asian-White encounters, which led her to conclude that schools were not providing curriculum which focused on the history or experiences of Asian Americans. After implementing her curriculum she asserts, "I am convinced that a curriculum focused on race, culture, and class provides a means of developing social communication and consciousness among individuals" (p. 124).

Another teacher researcher, Joan Cone (1994) surveys her students to find out why they consider themselves readers or non-readers. Several of those who identify as non-readers write that the books that they read in school do not relate to their lives. After giving them a choice of reading material, allowing them to read in groups, and implementing student-led book discussions, Cone finds more students finished their books than in previous classes. More importantly, when she surveys them again at the end of the semester the majority responds that they find real value in the assignment.

In their book on language development among preschoolers, French, Lucariello, Seidman, and Nelson (1990) assert that young children demonstrate advanced linguistic ability when they are allowed to speak about familiar topics.



The language used by children describing knowledge represented in scripts and by children playing on other settings that elicit interaction around scripts is more advanced syntactically, pragmatically, and semantically, than language used in other contexts (p. 2).

“Scripts” in this context refer to language describing experienced events in the child’s life. It seems logical, therefore, that the more school references students’ scripts and builds bridges between their schema, (ways of organizing knowledge) and new information to be learned, the better a child will accommodate that information.

Maxine Greene (1994) writes that teachers must be concerned with “pedagogies that enable persons to become as persons, developing in networks or relationships, seeking their freedom, finding their voices, looking through the perspectives opened by subject matters on a ‘reality’ that is never quite the same “ (p. 14). What may be beautiful and worthy to one individual is often problematic to another. Classrooms must be spaces where students may explore conflicting realities and “connection points with other human beings whose memories may link with theirs at certain junctures and, perhaps, seem alien at others” (p.14) may be discovered.

Many years ago, Erikson (1968) feared that advances in technology could form an environment so competitive it would lead to the extinction of humankind. He believed that only through coming to terms with cultural and national differences would we survive as a species. His hope was that the possibility of forging a universal commitment to ethics that would transcend, but not eliminate cultural and national differentiation existed within the realm of adolescent identity negotiation. The future projected by Erikson is here. The world has seen ethnic cleansing campaigns and continuous warfare elevated to new levels of devastation by technology. It is more than ever incumbent on

humans to find ways to accept and even celebrate differences before we obliterate each other. As an English teacher I know that literature is an excellent vehicle for initiating conversations on ethics and culture, as well as creating empathy for others. Therefore, I believe it is critical to continue to research its role in identity negotiation.

While this review of literature by no means represents the totality of research in the area, it does touch on the major themes relevant to the topic of identity negotiation in an educational setting: acculturation, ascription, achievement and inclusion. The literature above clearly demonstrates a plethora of variables associated with Chinese American identity negotiation including age, family relationships, size and resources of the ethnic community, generation in the U.S., socioeconomic status, class and educational background, home language maintenance, transnational contacts, religion, and individual interests. It also reveals the issues that Chinese Americans deal with despite the imputed success of this group of immigrants. The variables are synergistic, revealing the need for more research specific to the particular demographic studied. The particular population, second and 1.5 generation Chinese American middle school students, which my study focuses on is underrepresented. My study will take one small step in addressing this lack of representation.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### Theoretical Framework

Phelan, et al (1998) discuss the crucial role their case studies, based on student interviews, can play in sensitizing teachers to the dilemmas adolescents face transversing the worlds of home and school cultures. Qualitative research, like case studies, not only addresses what happens among students but may also touch on why these things happen. Because I believe that research dealing with why students identify the way they do is most useful in informing institutional change, I chose teacher research as my dominant methodology. Teacher research involves collecting data as an insider and reflecting on it in a systematic and intentional way (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993). My methodology also had an “action” component, in that it was used to improve my own practice.

Insider research, like any other research, has advantages and disadvantages. On the plus side, insiders can offer a unique perspective on their environment and participants (Rosaldo, 1989). As an insider who had spent extended periods of time with my participants in other contexts besides the study, my knowledge of their perspectives was deeper and more informed than any short-term investigation could provide. They wrote, acted, and articulated their views in my presence in a variety of contexts over a period of a year or more. Although I examined one slice of time during which we interacted, I had been reading their essays and poetry, listening to them debate ideas, and adjusting the curriculum to meet their needs throughout the year. My relationship with two of the participants had been established over a period of three years. In terms of the curriculum, I knew about their previous studies and the sources of their references to an

extent an outsider could not. In addition, the fact that they agreed to work with me on the project indicates their trust in me. This allowed them to speak honestly, and in one case, even argue with me, without fear of censure or negative repercussions.

Insiders, like any other researchers, must be careful of their own biases, assumptions, and oversights specifically related to their insider status (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 1994). To address these issues, my methodology included self-monitoring through the analysis of my thoughts recorded in a teaching journal throughout the school year. In addition, I provide substantial data and reflection on my own background and experiences so readers can draw their own conclusions regarding my possible biases, blind spots, and unsupported assumptions.

My methodology also included some aspects of participatory research. The goal of participatory research is to help the participants gain a deeper understanding of their social status so that they will be more equipped to address issues of inequity (Maguire, 1987). This methodology is based on the concept of co-researchers, rather than the traditional hierarchy of researcher and subject(s). Co-researchers have an opportunity to review documents and give input before the research is finalized.

I wasn't able to do a full participatory research project for several reasons. Foremost, due to the time line, the participants in this study did not have the opportunity to review the final written document, as they had already graduated and scattered to various parts of the city or in some cases, the world. I also had some reservations about giving them transcripts to review. Based on my experience working with this age group I have found many students have a tendency to believe what teachers say. This can detract from their ability to step back and review documents with a critical eye. I have also seen

them become disconcerted by the style of data transcription, which is conversational rather than formal. Seeing all their hesitations and sentence fragments in print can be daunting for a young adolescent who is just beginning to feel some mastery over the written language. This intimidates them and deflects their focus from the content of the text.

However, during the process of collecting data, I reviewed my findings with them and structured opportunities for them to bring up issues relevant to their lives. They also gave input on choosing the literature we read. In common with participatory research, the participants and researcher had an impact on each other's construction of knowledge. Their perspectives influenced how I framed questions, what literature I suggested both for the discussion group and for my classes, and how I determined generative themes. They, in turn, gained an enhanced awareness of second-generation immigrant issues.

Cochran-Smith (1993) contrasts teacher research with university-based research and concludes that it is valuable to the field because the questions are generated from reflective practice. They are often based on the discrepancy between an intended or expected outcome and what actually transpired. For example, my students' unexpected responses to literary analysis questions opened the door to an investigation into how my students view society and their place in it. Although questions may revolve around specific curriculum or practices in the classroom, they may relate to larger issues examining the connection between theory and practice. For example, asking how I can get my quiet students to become more vocal led to a much larger understanding of culturally sensitive pedagogy. "A unique feature of the questions that prompt teacher

research is that they emanate from neither theory or practice alone but from a critical reflection on the intersection of the two” (Cochran-Smith, 1993, p. 15).

The teacher’s particular access to the classroom facilitates the application of thick description (Geertz, 1983) and storytelling (Bell, 1992), two established methods of qualitative research. Because a teacher spends extensive periods of time with students compared to most university-based researchers and has a working knowledge of the community and culture of the school from years of association, she is in an advantageous position to interpret contextual issues. Clearly a teacher will have biases, but so will any researcher (Rosaldo, 1989). As long as a teacher attempts to clarify her biases, she is in a similar position to any other researcher vis-à-vis participants. Some of the power of teacher research is that process of “making the unconscious conscious” (Freedman, 1999, p. 31).

If we view theory as a combination of perspectives rather than taking a positivistic scientific approach, teacher research is again in a unique position to integrate multiple perspectives, drawing on the context and the setting of the research. Since teacher research builds on professional knowledge acquired over years it can make important contributions.

#### Background of the Researcher

The flashback reveals a lonely five year-old gazing longingly over the handlebars of her tricycle, at the chain link fence sitting atop a retaining wall across the street, the fence encircles a cacophonous sound wave of shouting, whistling, laughing, and stomping: recess at P.S. 117 in Queens, New York. The next year she would be one of those children she could hear but not see in the schoolyard. Standing outside, she never

imagined the struggle to belong there would actually begin when she entered as a first grader.

She had caught onto reading early, snuggled up in her mother's lap with Golden Books purchased at the supermarket. By the time she was six she was already reading fairy tales on her own. The first grade primer caught her by surprise. The text was so sparse, "See Jane run. See Spot run. Run, Spot, run," she concluded the message had to be in the pictures. Jane was blond and blue eyed. She had a big brother, Dick, who had straight brown hair and blue eyes, and a little sister, Sally. They had a dog and a cat and lived in a two-storey house. That was just enough information to make our protagonist feel like an outsider looking in. In contrast to Jane she was an only child, her mother hated cats, and all the bedrooms in her house were on the first floor. Spending hours each day with those characters burned a memory so powerful it still evokes a tinge of alienation and abnormality half a century later.

The yard was little better. There, children competed intensely for popularity and acceptance. Boys dominated, and girls negotiated, acquiescing that the pronoun "he" somehow included them, albeit in a subordinate role. Although the predominantly white school enrolled a few foreign children of color from Parkway Village where the United Nations housed functionaries, neither teachers nor administrators paid much attention to the potential these students had to expand educational horizons. A few multicultural assemblies where people came in ethnic dress sufficed as inclusion. The foreign students were expected to learn American games, language, and etiquette, and they did. Usually they stayed for only a year or two and returned to their homelands. Getting to know these

children made her want to learn their languages and share their perspectives, but this she had to do on her own time. At school Dick, Jane, and their ethos prevailed.

Twenty years later when I decided to enter the teaching profession in the late 1970s, the formative experiences described above propelled me to the field of multicultural literature. I instinctively looked for stories in the textbooks that reflected the cultures and faces of my students. When I didn't find them, I scoured bookstore shelves, remembering how excluded I had felt in the most significant socializing institution of my primary years. If I, as a white, semi-urban, middle class, English proficient, 2.5 generation American felt marginalized, I concluded that my dark skinned, bilingual, or dialect speaking, 1.5 generation and African American urban students would have similar, if not stronger reactions to the canon of Eurocentric literature that prevailed in schools of that time. Meanwhile, as an adult reader, I was experiencing the richness of an array of cultural viewpoints I had missed out on as a student educated in the U.S. when the American Empire had just ascended to its zenith.

In my neighborhood, divisions occurred across religious lines. Other children did not ask, "Where are you from? Instead, they asked quite simply, "What are you?" I didn't know then, and still don't know now, how to respond because the answer was so complicated. My father was a convert to atheism. My paternal grandfather came to the U.S. as a Hebrew school principal and groomed my father, the oldest boy, to become a rabbi, literally beating the language into his son's head. My father went along with the program until his first week of rabbinical school. During breaks the young men would relax. When he found the cafeteria reverberating with curses and profanity, my father



could not reconcile the hypocrisy. He left the school and the religion in one clean break and never looked back.

Ironically, my father fell in love with a woman of the same heritage, but he didn't learn about her background until much later. Her name was Annette Garfield. How much more Anglo can you get? Her father had left the old country, also Russia, as a teenager and met my maternal grandmother in the U. S. His goal was to assimilate. He was an entrepreneur. Most of his children became Communists. My mother's only connection to the culture of her ancestors was culinary. All the Yiddish I learned as a child related to menus. My father never used Yiddish or Hebrew. When I asked him the answer to the question, "What are you?" he responded, "Tell them you're a girl. Judaism is a religion and we're not religious." However, I knew that his answer was not that simple. W.E.B. DuBois (1968) puts Jews in a racial category. In the 1950s as I was growing up I had the impression that most people I came into contact with espoused that view. Although I later learned that Jews vary widely in phenotype and skin color, there was a stereotypical Jewish phenotype that I fit. As I got older, most people looked at me, heard my name and simply assumed I was Jewish. I have rarely challenged them.

I try to imagine how students might see me, now. Grey hair, pale, wrinkled skin, green eyes, and rubbery face prone to grimaces, short stature and lean. They would call my clothing "preppy," I guess, wool pants and sweaters, but I undercut that image with some zany socks, leopard print or chili pepper, that peek through. I would love to have Ms. Frizzle's *Magic School Bus* wardrobe but it's not sold at any ready-to-wear venue. Over the years I have learned to project my voice so that it booms across the classroom (and possibly even reaches the imaginary "bored old man waiting at the bus stop on

Geary Street” on whose behalf I appeal to students to raise their volume. Now I just pick the person farthest away from the speaker and say, “You just said something that \_\_\_\_\_ needs to hear. Please tell her.” I know how to command respect but then I’ll undermine it by suddenly falling on the floor to demonstrate some character’s inner turmoil. I try to confine those sorts of actions to my sixth grade class because they are more open and appreciative. The eighth graders look askance at such antics. Recently, when one of my sixth graders showed the hall monitor her pass to my room at lunch, the eighth grade commented, “You’re going to Ms. Gold’s? She’s crazy.” The sixth grader, in her candor, told me and wondered how anyone could think that. But of course, I was hurt. At the same time, part of me refuses to conform to students’ expectations of teacher behavior. I want my students to realize there are alternatives to conformity, that we can still be a caring, responsible collective without normative appearance, customs, or beliefs. I try to be a role model for them in tolerance and respectful behavior towards those with different perspectives. I’m not a paragon in this regard, but at least I’m open to change.

#### Selecting the Participants

The sample for this research was a group of seven eighth grade students whose school records indicated “Chinese” as their ethnicity or who self-identified as either Chinese or Chinese American. The participants were drawn both from students I knew from previous years and those who showed an interest in the topic in my class during discussions of literature.

Because this age group is beginning to seek independence from their parents, I could not simply send letters home requesting parent permission before inviting them to join. I was in a unique position as a trusted adult, often privileged to hear about problems

at home. As a teacher I walk a fine line between validating students' perspectives and giving them an adult perspective, ostensibly less emotionally charged than what they may hear from their parents. I also share stories about my struggles with my own children to help them gain some insight into parent/child conflicts. For this reason I had to approach students first to assess their interest in being involved in discussions about what it means to be Chinese American. Once they expressed an interest in a hypothetical project, I gave them a letter to be signed by parents. Only those students whose parents gave permission were invited to attend the meetings.

The students were well acquainted with me either because they had been in my class their first year of middle school and/or because they elected to spend their lunch hour in my room as friends of my students. Since I had been conducting discussion groups for the previous two years, several of them had already participated in one of those groups.

#### Data Collection

Between March and May of 2007 I led four 40-minute audio taped book discussion groups with seven participants in my classroom during lunch for approximately 40 minutes. Each meeting focused on participants' responses to a section of a young adult novel, *Nothing But the Truth (and a Few White Lies)* by Justina Chen Headley. I encouraged them to contribute their own topics and questions for discussion. Prior to each meeting I reviewed the section and prepared focus questions to initiate discussion but allowed the participants to continue on their own. As either their current or former teacher I knew balancing the two roles, teacher and researcher, would be

challenging. However, I tried to intervene in the discussion only when it strayed far off topic or when it lagged.

In addition to the lunch discussions, I took field notes on the in-class discussions of a small group of students reading *Child of the Owl* by Lawrence Yep. Both books were selected based on the criteria below.

Criterion	<i>Nothing but the Truth (and a Few White Lies)</i>	<i>Child of the Owl</i>
Authenticity of author's voice	Chinese American author	Chinese American author
Relevance of content	Young adult exploring bicultural identity in a dominant culture setting	Young adult exploring ethnic identity in an ethnic setting
Readability	Humorous, accessible style	Humorous, accessible style combined with detective story elements
Literary elements	Engaging, realistic characters, plot twists, contemporary local setting, age appropriate themes	Engaging, realistic characters, plot twists, local setting thirty years ago, age appropriate themes

The in-class group was given the choice of reading from a short list of young adult novels with multicultural content. Using a teacher--and student--generated list students selected and ranked three interesting books they had not previously read. Four book groups were formed consisting of students who had listed that particular book as one of their top two choices. I monitored two book groups, alternating days, while a student teacher monitored the other two groups. Students were assigned roles, which changed each day. The roles included discussion director, illustrator, lexicographer, summarizer, character analyst, and geographer, loosely adapted from Harvey Daniel's (2001) Literature Circles methodology.

Besides collecting data from students, I wrote journal entries a minimum of once a week throughout the year. The entries focused on issues of identity, racism, stereotyping, and ways to deal with diversity as they came up during student/student and teacher/student classroom interactions. This journal documents changes that took place in my curriculum, attitude, and knowledge as a result of the book discussion meetings with participants during lunch school, the book group meetings in class, and relevant literature I reviewed in conjunction with the study. It also includes reflection on student responses to other reading and writing assignments throughout the year.

Each student who participated in the lunch book discussion group was asked to fill out a survey and take part in an audio-taped 30 to 45 minute semi structured interview. The surveys were given to the students to take home and fill out, but only two participants were willing to take the time to complete them, limiting their usefulness. However, the survey questions prepared the students for the type of questions I asked in the interview (see appendixes). All the interviews, save one, took place after school in my classroom. The final interview was conducted in a public library where the participant was doing volunteer work. Because the interviews were scheduled late in the school year, one participant, Laurie, was not able to attend an interview. While I would have preferred to have interview data from all the participants in the book discussion group, I do not feel that the absence of her interview significantly impacts my findings.

### Research Setting

The data were collected at Oceanview Middle School where I have been teaching for the past seven years. Meetings with students were held in my classroom during the lunch period. Oceanview is located in an ethnically and racially diverse residential

neighborhood in San Francisco, California. The school has a good reputation for having a safe and academically challenging environment, which draws students from all neighborhoods of the city.

In 2007-2008, the school's ethnic breakdown was 48.4% Asian (42.5% of Chinese heritage), 15.1% white, 6.2% Hispanic or Latino, and 5.9% African American. An additional 8.2% "decline to state" but the majority of those students are most likely Asian based on previous years' statistics when that was not an option. This indicates a high concentration of Asians in the school since only 36% of the school district's student body is Asian. Asian American students filled the majority of student council roles which could be correlated to their prevalence in the school.

Oceanview is one of the largest schools in the district, averaging about 1200 students each year, evenly distributed across the sixth, seventh, and eighth grade levels. The students are tracked into an honors strand, a general education strand, or an ELD strand. There are also several special day classes for students with individual education plans (IEPs).

In terms of academic achievement, 65 %t of the students scored in the proficient to advanced range on the California Standards Test (CST) in English language arts and 72% in mathematics. In the school district, by contrast, only 44.7% scored in the same range in English language arts, and 47.5 % in mathematics. Approximately 46% of the students were eligible for free and reduced lunch. Eleven percent were in designated English Language Development classes (ELD). Forty one percent of the students were designated G.A.T.E. (gifted and talented) in at least one subject.

### Data Analysis

In the analysis of data I looked for generative themes that arose during the book discussion meetings and interviews. I also reviewed my teaching journal entries looking for a deepening of my understanding of students and ideas on translating that understanding into practice. In qualitative teacher research the emphasis is on the reader's recognition of a situation that has elements in common with his or her own, rather than whether the research is generalizable (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 1994). Therefore, it is up to the reader to decide on the applicability of the research.

### Protection of Human Subjects

Participants were treated in accordance with the protocols for the protection of human subjects. Parents were sent a cover letter requesting permission for their child to participate and a form to sign. When they signed the form, the researcher formally invited the child to participate. Parents were given a copy of the signed consent form. Both parents and child were advised that the child could withdraw from the study at any time with no repercussions. In order to maintain confidentiality, audiotapes and notes are stored in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home (see appendixes).

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

#### Introduction

Seeing an average of 30 to 40 students in a 50-minute period and between 100 to 180 students each day, middle school teachers are usually limited to two kinds of interactions, except for an occasional one-on-one conversation. We conduct class discussions, circumscribed by our framing of the questions, and we monitor small group discussions, gleaning fragments of conversation before moving on. The kind of sustained give and take between teacher and student, as well as uninterrupted and prolonged attention to student/student communication in an informal setting documented here is a rare occurrence in the ebb and flow of a typical classroom. Even strategies like Socratic seminars can constrain student voice because only the bravest students feel comfortable fully expressing their thoughts or feelings in front of peer observers. For these reasons I chose to present the data in a relatively “uncooked” state.

To edit, summarize, and categorize their voices is to detract from the potential to learn from the performative elements of their self-expression. In deference to Jessica’s comment regarding the invisibility of Chinese in America, I seek to present the words of my participants as they are spoken: their inflections, their vocabulary, their hesitations, their associative flow, and their groping for clarity. Language is a fundamental aspect of identity; the subtleties of their pursuit of self-definition would be lost in paraphrase. The data are presented chronologically to give the reader a sense of the fluidity and contextual nature of identity negotiations. Reading these dialogues gives insight into the paths these



young adolescents explore as their understanding of identity evolves, devolves, and revolves in response to the literature and the meaning they co-construct.

I struggled throughout the year in my classroom to draw my students out of silence. In the security of our discussion groups, self expression blossomed, and it is these voices, not mine, that should take the stage.

The six interviews, four book discussion meetings, and excerpts from my teaching journal presented in this chapter provide the thick description (Geertz, 1983) I will later analyze in response to my three research questions:

1. How do Chinese/Chinese American youth negotiate identity in school?
2. How is literature a tool for negotiating identity?
3. How do I, as a teacher, facilitate the process of identity negotiation for Chinese/Chinese American students through literature?

In addition, the reader can tease out the ideological and attitudinal changes I, as a teacher, undergo as I come to a deeper understanding of my students' contexts, frames of reference, and histories. In this sense the project is action research. As I revise my assumptions, my capacity to address the needs of this particular group of individuals expands, as does my potential to reach future groups of students. It is clear that a classroom teacher responsible for developing content knowledge and skills for over one hundred students a day, will not have the time to know each individual student to the extent that I now know this group of six. However, in the process of coming to know these six young adolescents I have learned new ways to approach my students as individuals, with an appreciation of the fluidity and vulnerability of their self-definition at this age.

Because the majority of the participants in this study were in my eighth grade English class at the time I was collecting data, establishing some context seems important. I kept a journal throughout the year, reflecting on my teaching practice, research, and relevant student comments. Using excerpts from this journal clarifies what preceded the literature focus group and introduces some of the participants' thoughts prior to our first book discussion group meeting.

Our theme for the year in my eighth grade English class was “dealing with differences.” Since the students simultaneously studied U.S. history, we looked at several texts about the treatment of minority groups, including *Wooden Fish Songs*, a fictionalized biography of a Chinese immigrant set in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. After reading *To Kill a Mockingbird* I showed a film, *Twilight Los Angeles, 1992*, based on a theater piece by Anna Deavere Smith. Smith collected hundreds of interviews with Angelinos in the wake of the Rodney King Riots in 1992, selecting the most poignant and/or representative to bring to life. As she launched into each role, using a simple prop like a hat or glasses, her entire demeanor changed. This film brought in the perspectives of the diverse communities affected by the riots, including Koreans, whose neighborhood was a buffer between the black and white communities. Students read *Gong Lum v. Rice*, a Supreme Court case in which a Chinese American family sued their local Mississippi school district for not allowing their daughter to attend the “white” school close to their home, sending her instead to enroll in a “colored school” attended mainly by African Americans. They also read excerpts from *The Mississippi Chinese: Between Black and White* (Loewen, 1971). I chose these texts, in addition to the film, hoping to generate more empathy and knowledge regarding the similarities between the

experiences of African Americans and Asian Americans vis-à-vis racism. In response to the article on *Gong Lum v. Rice*, Jessica comments, “It seems like everything is about black and white and Chinese don’t even exist.” While Jessica is referring to whites’ arbitrary conflation of all non-whites, I felt strongly that our textbooks and curriculum, while attempting to be inclusive, also lost sight of our school’s dominant population. I wanted to ensure that my Chinese American students wouldn’t feel the same kind of invisibility in my classroom.

Partly in reaction to Jessica’s comment, I offered her class a choice of four novels to read. The students were directed to bring in lists of interesting books they had heard about or had read and would recommend to others, in addition to books I suggested. To address Jessica’s frustration I proposed *Child of the Owl* by Lawrence Yep, set in San Francisco’s Chinatown. This list was posted and each student selected three books. The students’ selections were then compiled and narrowed to the four most requested books. Because I didn’t want to give the literature circle groups total independence, selecting the four books with the most votes allowed my student teacher and me to meet with one group every other day. Jessica, along with six other students selected *Child of the Owl*. Four of them: Jessica, Susan, Winston, and Justin, had also agreed to participate in my book discussion group reading *Nothing but The Truth (and a Few White Lies)*. During the month that we read *Child of the Owl*, I had the opportunity to work closely with those four on a text that raised many of the same issues of identity as *Nothing but The Truth (and a Few White Lies)*. This afforded interesting comparisons for our discussion group. While *Nothing but The Truth (and a Few White Lies)* is set in a Seattle suburb and Stanford University, the setting of *Child of the Owl* is local and familiar. However, the

latter takes place almost four decades earlier, while the former is contemporary, with references to current technology and fashion. This enabled the participants who read both books to compare cultural and immigration issues across time and space. The following entries from my teaching journal chronicle our *Child of the Owl* discussions and my reflections.

March 6, 2007

I sat in on the *Child of the Owl* reading group today. The group seemed interested in the book. Jessica talked about how the uncle, “Phil the Pill,” wanted to be “All American” and that’s why Paw Paw, Casey’s grandmother didn’t like him. I was pretty clear that Jessica agreed with Paw Paw. One of the descriptions the author gives of his wannabe personality is his interest in bridge. The students don’t know about bridge so I compared it to Mah Jong. They knew a lot about Mah Jong. I said that bridge was similar in that it is a gambling game and involves strategy, but mainly middle class suburbanites play it. Instead of being noisy and extroverted, it is sedate, calculating, and for keeps. Students talked about how their extended families liked to play for fun but then gave the money back. Talking about Mah Jong also put Barney, Casey’s flakey father in a different light. His gambling habit now seems to have an element of cultural alienation. His wife’s family doesn’t accept him so he doesn’t have a safe place to gamble or any support when he loses. The students understand the Barney’s moral ambiguity. On the one hand he is loving and playful, on the other, he is an irresponsible jerk.

We also talked about Chinatown. Casey’s description focuses on the buildings’ being squashed together. I asked whether that seemed like a realistic description for Chinatown. Some of the students said they think of the noise and the crowds more than the buildings. They thought Casey used that lens because she was riding in her uncle’s car and the windows were closed. I thought that was a great way to explain her perspective. We also talked about how Hong Kong Chinese put down Mainland Chinese and don’t want to be associated with them. This goes back to Hall’s and Espiritu’s ideas about identity in relation to a power dynamic. Chinese only identify as Chinese when confronting or confronted by the European American power structure. Otherwise they disaggregate into many different regional identities.

March 8

I met with the *Child of the Owl* group again today. This time we got into a conversation about ghosts. It started because Jessica had a lot to say about her grandmother. The chapter in the book included a long

folktale that the grandmother tells Casey when she's feeling lonely and lost. Jessica was the connector [each student had a particular role to play in the discussion] so she talked about her own grandmother and her long stories. "When she starts I just pretend I'm not listening and eventually she'll stop." "Why do you want her to stop," I ask. "Because it's boring."

It seems to me that Lawrence Yep wrote the book with exactly that generation gap in mind. While Jessica puts down "American" wannabes like Phil the Pill part of her may be negotiating that process. Justin, on the other hand, seems more interested in having a dual cultural identity. He has family in Hong Kong that he talks about, and for his graphic presentation he used pictures of Hong Kong and Chinatown, S.F. Wendy then talked about some of the rituals her grandmother carries out to communicate with her dead husband—burning paper money and shirts. Justin told me that one can also buy cell phones and i-pods. Jessica's grandmother, I ascertained, does not burn cell phones for her deceased husband.

Since Jessica mentioned that her grandfather sees ghosts, we got onto the subject of supernatural phenomenon—a perennial favorite of middle school students.. I started to tell them my ghost story when the bell rang. Did I really hear Cool Dude Justin say, "This is the best class" on his way out? I'll have to find a way to check on that. What it is—seven students of Chinese American heritage reading a book about the traditions of China juxtaposed with the lived reality of a Chinese American pre-teen. It gives the students an opportunity to bring up things they are interested in and expand on the text to self, world and text connections. I get to be a fly on the wall some of the time, a prodder at others, and a seeker of knowledge at still others. They want to explain Chinatown to me and I haven't yet shared with them that I crossed Chinatown everyday for fifteen years.

March 15

When I sit down with *The Child of the Owl* group the first thing Jessica says is that we should make a video called *Twilight Chinatown*. Winston is skeptical. "Do you know anyone in Chinatown." "No, but my grandmother has contacts. We could talk to her friends." Last week Jessica told us that she doesn't listen when her grandmother tells stories. Now she wants to film her grandmother's friends! It may be late in the year to pursue this but maybe Jessica will pull something off herself.

The conversation ranges through many topics, most of them spinning off of the book, but some of them going so far a field that I intervene to reign them in--again the guillotine of time looms. They talk about Asian girls who use the tag 'l'il' or "cute" in their e-mail addresses. Jessica does not see herself this way—she's much more of a Casey type than a Pam-Pam [a "princess" character] and she gets validation from the boys, Winston and Justin for this stance. She's very aware that this is an Asian female stereotype.

We do some comparisons of Chinese from Hong Kong and mainland. They talk about the word Casey coins “Pachinko.” I tell them about Pachucos in California in the 1940s. They talk about why Chinese Americans would call each other ‘Chinks.’ I mention the way African Americans use the word “nigga” to denote membership. It is a restricted word—only available to cultural/racial/ethnic insiders—a new way to get people to stop using the word—like reverse psychology. I sense of all the reading groups I have sat with this one is the most charged with energy. I don’t think it’s only because of the particular personalities. Jessica has certainly been one of the voiceless girls in the class for most of the year. And timid Beth fights to get a word in. I think the topic is really ringing their bells!

March 22

Yesterday it was Dao Day, [a simulated experience of the Daoist school of thought included in our social studies curriculum] so I wrote some characters on the board for the students to use on their posters—mountain, water, sky, day, sun, moon. When I walked back into the room from hall duty there was a cluster of students writing more characters on the board. [The characters were still posted when the eighth graders came in.]

Maybe something similar happened with the *Child of the Owl* reading group. Suddenly they were irrepressible. Today I wanted to talk about *Twilight Chinatown*. I asked what kind of information each person could collect. Susan talked about interviewing a shopkeeper. At that point I realized that the project could get very far away from the book so I reminded them that since they were doing a final project for the book we should stick to the themes. I asked each of them to write down as many themes they could think of from the book. We got a great list: Criminal underworld (Justin) generation (Alan), family obligations (Jessica), trust, traditions, being yourself versus peer pressure, gambling, addiction, prejudice. They had all of my themes plus more that I wouldn’t have included if it had been my own list.

The blending of their ideas and mine made it much more interesting. I asked them if there was any theme that they didn’t think they could ask about. “Criminals,” said Justin, “because they wouldn’t want to talk to us. I said, “But you could ask people in Chinatown about criminals. They might know, just like Mr. Jeh wasn’t a criminal but his grandson had connections with that world. And remember that people might have been pushed into being criminals—like Barney. What made him go bad?” “Because he couldn’t get a good job even though he got straight As,” said Jeanie. “Yeah, and his wife could because she was cute,” said Jessica. “So it was prejudice that pushed people into the ‘criminal underground?’ See how some of these themes are connected.”

We discussed how the students could get people to want to talk to them. They all agreed that people wouldn’t want to talk to them because

they would say it wasn't any of their business. I suggested they could get their contacts to open up by telling them that they had read a book about Chinatown in the 1960s and now wanted to know if it had changed. Jessica started talking about the different waves of immigrants in Chinatown—how the Taiwanese had pushed out the Cantonese, etc. I wonder if she knew that information before or if the book inspired her to get more information??

March 27

The students are really involved with their Chinatown movie project. Today Winston came in at lunch to interview a friend who lives in Chinatown. I would like to ask them how this project has changed the way they think about the world. Wow! I feel so privileged to be able to watch this process unfolding. I told Winston it was the best thing that happened to me this year. He seemed very pleased. And more students want to join the “book club.”

Researchers must narrow their topic, and the questions they ask delimit the conclusions they reach (Rosaldo, 1989). From the beginning of the project, I was aware of this constraint. An entry from my journal reflects my feelings about the issue:

I've been feeling strange about choosing students for my study on the basis of race. By doing so I am participating in the same socially constructed phenomenon, the same “colored epistemology” (Scheurich & Young, 1997) I want to question. Elise, biracial European/African American, MacKenzie, European American, Amy, Amanda, and Melissa, Chinese American all come to eat lunch in my room together. I love having lunch with students because it allows me to keep current with the latest gossip and issues the students are dealing with—an inter-role, intergenerational social gathering. Now I have to ask them to stay out while we have our “Chinese” group meeting. I say to Marie and Jessica, “I feel bad about excluding others from the group but I have to narrow my topic. Besides, I thought you might not say certain things if others were around that you would say if they're not.” They nod.

When I speak to Jessica and Marie about participating in the study, their initial comments validate the relevance of the topic. My teaching journal from that day reads:

I invite Jessica and Marie to be part of the group discussing Chinese Americans. Jessica says, “It's funny how in elementary school you don't notice race and then in middle school...yeah.” Her voice trails off as she nods. Marie says, “Yeah. Even if your family is prejudiced you don't pay

attention to the stereotypes and then in middle school you just can't help it."

In deference to Jessica's comment regarding the invisibility of Chinese in America I seek to present the words of my participants as they are spoken: their inflections, their vocabulary, their hesitations, their associative flow, and their groping for clarity. Language is a fundamental aspect of identity; the subtleties of their pursuit of self-definition would be lost in paraphrase. I struggled throughout the year in my classroom to draw them out of silence. In the security of our book discussion groups, self-expression blossomed and carried over into the interviews. It is these voices, not mine, that should take the stage.

#### First Book Discussion Group Meeting

##### *Asians Are Prejudiced*

Jessica's comment: "She's being mean to her mommy," opens our first discussion. She goes on to describe how children sometimes get into arguments with their mothers and do not realize it until later how "mean" and "annoying" they've been. In the scene she refers to in the book, the main character, Patty, is commiserating with her white friend about how strange her mother is. Both Patty and Jessica relate to the feeling of disloyalty this evokes. Although Jessica finds the character realistic, and even identifies with her, she dislikes her for her actions.

In the book a Taiwanese student falls in love with a European American studying in Taiwan. They get married and have two children, Patty and Abe, but split up during the second pregnancy. The father has no subsequent contact with the children. The book deals with Patty's struggles to make sense of her bicultural identity in the face of parental and peer pressure to fit in.



Justin asks, “Why didn’t they use protection?” Although Justin and Winston are so close they could be described as “joined at the hip,” Justin is more comfortable with and overtly interested in relationships with girls.

Asking Justin to explain what he means by protection evokes giggles from all the participants, and no one volunteers to speak. I remind the group that it is “OK” to talk about these things because that’s what the book is about. Finally, Justin says, “Why didn’t...why didn’t they use a condom?” Winston answers, “Cause they were in love.” He draws out the word ‘love’ giving it a slightly ironic connotation. There follows a discussion, which reveals confusion about the relationship between the characters’ mother and father. Jessica thinks the mother had been raped, but Winston points out that they had two children and came to the U.S. together, making that an unlikely scenario:

SG: Jessica, why do you assume there was a rape instead of a relationship?

Winston: That’s why she [the mother] hates white people.

Jessica: It’s a prejudice like every Asian family has.

Marie: Yeah, it is.

Jessica: Because they were always ‘stickin’ it to the man,’ and the ‘man’ was almost always white.

SG: Or do you mean the man was stickin’ it to them? (laughter)

Marie: So if a white person is in charge and they aren’t happy so they might grow to have a prejudice against white people. But now the kids that are born in America and are raised with white people, they’re not gonna have that prejudice.”

Jessica explains that Asian families believe that they are “higher” than white people, but there is general agreement that the participants don’t feel that way. Winston adds, “Asians are prejudiced,” and the students all laugh, realizing that he is also stereotyping.

In the meantime, participants are unclear whether both children had the same father, because Abe, the firstborn, looked more Chinese than Patty. When I ask whether

they know families where siblings with the same biological parents look different, Marie brings up her own experience. She mentions first that she has “huge eyes and Asians have small eyes. Strangers say, ‘Is your dad white?’” She also mentions having brown hair. I ask if it’s possible that an ancestor was from another ethnic background. Her first reaction is, “My family would have *shunned* them.” She then tempers her first statement, “Well, maybe not shunned...but I would have known about it.”

*Asians, Chinese, and Community: “Speaking for Me, Right Now”*

In the midst of the conversation about families and prejudice, the students wonder whether all Asians feel the same way. They also agree that most of the Asians in their community are Chinese, which is certainly true of the school population.

Justin: Chinese people are half of the world.

Marie: Like the Russian community...everyone knows each other. I don’t think...(incredulously) Do Chinese people have that?

Jessica: No, they just gossip and they hate each other.

This dialogue reflects the quasi-competitive relationship Patty’s mother has with her circle of friends, occasionally bragging about their children, occasionally vying for the distinction of having the most difficult child. However, since they have not gotten that far into the story, I do not bring it up. I ask Jessica if she feels like she’s “dissing<sup>11</sup>” the culture by speaking that way. Wendy and some of students say, “Yeah,” and laugh but Marie insists, “Totally not, because I’m part of it. We’re just a group of people who are critical.” Laurie adds that there are good and bad people in every culture so it’s all right to talk about the bad parts of the culture. Jessica brings up the example of going to San Jose with a Vietnamese friend of the family and her friend’s reaction to seeing

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<sup>11</sup> From black English, a shortened form of the word “disrespecting,” prevalent in young adults’ lexicon

Vietnamese loitering and smoking. “She said, ‘They’re giving Vietnamese people like me a bad name. If you didn’t know me, you’d assume that all Vietnamese people are like that,’ and I’m like maybe.”

As the conversation continues, there is a growing awareness that they cannot speak for anyone but themselves, and that their opinions do not represent the whole group. They become more careful about qualifying their statements. For example, Winston says, “Speaking for me right now, we’re grown to be cautious.” I ask if he is referring to himself as representative of Chinese Americans or as an individual. He says, “Well, I don’t know what other people think because I haven’t talked to them.”

*Stereotypes: Alphabet Soup*

During the *Child of the Owl* discussions, students identified the media as a source of misunderstandings and confusions about Chinese and Chinese American culture.

SG: So are you saying it is a good idea to acknowledge the good and bad aspects of the culture so that people will realize there are individuals involved?”

Winston: Yeah, that not all Chinese are like the people you meet in Chinatown.

Mei :Yeah, or martial arts movies.

I bring up the stereotype of Charlie Chan. At first the students think I mean Jackie Chan until I explain that Charlie Chan was a television detective character played by a European American actor. Jessica says, “Yeah, he’s the guy who sits at the head of the desk, and he has all these short guys working for him... he’s like six feet tall, and he tells them, ‘all right guys, let’s get to work’ in Chinese, really beautiful Chinese, and my dad says, ‘Why can’t you speak like that?’”

They begin to talk about the situational aspect of stereotyping. Jessica relates that her cousin goes to school in Hong Kong where there are only one or two white students,

and the Chinese students don't like them. "But if you came here and went to a private school or something like that where there was like all white people, and only one or two Asians, you would be like FOB, FOB." I'm assuming her use of the pronoun "you" refers to the one or two Asians because mainly Asian Americans use FOB. I personally have never heard European Americans use the term, either in reference to Asians of any generation, or other European immigrants.

The students begin a digression into contrasting fashion choices between Chinese and American teenagers. Their descriptors for FOBs include blond choppy hair, and lots of colors. Justin believes that clothing moves out of fashion more quickly in Hong Kong than in the U.S. I ask students if they can think of a reason for the high interest in fashion. They had several thoughts about their possible influences—Harajuku, (a Tokyo district known for innovative youth fashion) and Hollywood. I give them my theory about people who immigrated from mainland China, to either Hong Kong or the U.S.: in the 1960s to the 1980s the only clothing available were blue quilted jackets and wide-leg blue trousers. They don't believe me and tell me that it sounds like the stories their parents tell them about having to gather firewood with no shoes on and getting punished for losing 20 cents. Winston says, "It sounds like the eighteenth century." I tell them about the Cultural Revolution and how everyone had to wear the same thing. Marie immediately catches my gist, "So now they can be individuals."

Although I expected to interject only to ask questions or keep the discussion flowing, I find myself dialoguing with the participants. I wrote in my journal after this session, "It's very hard for me to stay out of the conversation. This is not at all standard observation but we are learning from each other."

I tell them about my experience teaching English in Mexico to the children whose parents worked for the large hotels in Ixtapa, a big government development targeting international tourism. When I describe the corrugated iron shacks and open sewers, Laurie says she is reminded of visiting her family's village in China. They started out staying in a friend's modern apartment in the city. On her arrival in the village the "live" chickens capture her attention. She describes the toilet as being a "hole" with three walls and no door.

Jessica: Whenever they [parents] tell stories, I kinda picture it like black and white.

Winston: Every time my father talks he makes it sound like he's so perfect and pointing out everything that I did wrong. "When I was little there was nothing to eat; there was nothing to do; I had to walk five miles to go to school, I went to the library, I spent all my money on books." I don't care!"

Jessica : "When I reached puberty I was so hungry I mixed sugar with water and drank it."

Marie: They're the ones that give us all this good stuff.

All: It's not like we chose it!

Jessica (mimicking her mother's voice): "If I could go to school like you, I would study my hardest," and I was like, if you were me you wouldn't want your parents trashing you about this.

SG: Do you think Patty's mother is trying to undo the mistakes she made through her daughter?"

The participants agree, but protest, "You can't do that!" Justin expresses that he doesn't want to think about his parents' early lives because that "ultimately leads to where I'm born and that's just disgusting." He has come full circle to his original question, "Why didn't they use protection?"

Between sessions one and two, Jessica and Susan are invited to speak to a graduate seminar on immigration at the University of San Francisco. After their presentation I make the following note in my journal:

[Jessica] said it wasn't until this year when we started talking about discrimination and segregation that she realized she went to a school that was mainly Asian. They use the adjective white to describe white students because there are so few everyone knows whom you're talking about. (It wouldn't be helpful to use Asian as a descriptor in Presidio, there are too many).

During their presentation I learn more about their particular family situations.

Jessica's mother graduated from high school, but her father and both Susan's parents have a middle school education. Their grandparents moved here and then brought the parents when they were in their twenties. They had all lived in Chinatown before moving to the Richmond. Both sets of parents speak little English. They took English classes when they first got here but had to stop when they found jobs. Now they don't have time to continue. I write in my journal:

Jessica talked about how her mother used to embarrass her because she was loud, but now she's not so embarrassed. She has watched other mothers being loud and they don't bother her so she asked herself why she was discriminating against her own mother. Her friends don't seem bothered by her mother, just as their mothers don't bother her. Now she says, "That's just the way she is."

They also comment on parental pressure regarding grades. They both agree if they bring home a test with a 98% their parents ask, "What happened to the other two points?" If the whole class fails and they get a D their parents will say, "I don't care what the other kids got. I want to know why *you* failed." However, if other people in the class get As they say, "Why didn't you get an A?" Both of them talked about hearing their parents' voices echoing in their heads when they make decisions. Jessica's mother used to call her at school to ask how to spell certain words, and she learned to fill out her mother's checks when she was in third grade.

Another topic is the difference among elementary, middle, and high school regarding racial bullying. Both girls say in elementary school, people made a big deal if someone made a racist remark. “Now other people will pull their eyes back and speak ‘Ching Chong’ and I just ignore it, say whatever.” I don’t ask what race these students are. Instead, I ask, “You mean nobody tells the teacher?” Susan responds, “Yeah.” They believe students segregate even more in high school. Jessica says, “I went up to Portola High and there was only one Chinese girl hanging out with the black kids, but she wasn’t doing anything, just standing there. Everybody else was in groups with their own race.”

### Second Book Discussion Group Meeting

#### *Racism, Discrimination, and Stereotyping*

We do a check in to see what chapter they’re on—they should have read up to chapter nine. Justin and Susan have already finished the book.

I ask them how they reacted to the quotation, “What weird *Chinesie* thing is your mom doing to you now?” (p. 31). Patty has just eaten the curative soup her mother made and then gone to visit her European American friend, Janie. Janie asks, “What stinks?” Patty narrates that she covers her “mama poisoned breath” with her hand. Winston says ironically, “What a friend!” Jessica and Marie respond that the friend is being prejudiced. Winston and Michelle term Patty’s statement racist. They’re particularly offended because the statement is made in relation to her mother:

Winston: It’s like saying, ‘Your Mama.’ She betrays her mom.

Marie (matter-of-factly): She’s whitewashed.

Justin: You don’t need anything else; you need your roots and family.

Marie (teasingly): You’re being so deep.

The students ask whether the tape is on, and we have a brief interlude when I talk about the purpose of the tape—to record the thoughts of middle school students of

Chinese ancestry because this has not been done yet. The research literature is written about high school and college students. They ask how they're different from high school students and I tell them it's because they're more willing to say what they're thinking.

Marie: We don't think enough about what we say, yet.

Winston: We can't keep our mouth shut.

Jessica: I love to talk.

My journal notes confirm their observations, "The kids are so talkative. Very different from when they're in a large group in class. I can hardly get a word in."

Justin berates the boy who spits at Patty during an episode of racial taunting, "Racist bastard." Marie wonders whether the last name of the boy she likes is Japanese because his last name ends in "ki". Perhaps the author meant to be deliberately ambiguous here? I thought he was Polish.

*China Dolls, Bleaching Parties, Raven's Wings, and Mongrels*

Justin asks whether Patty wears glasses. The participants begin to analyze the cover photograph representing Patty. Marie comments that she looks "ugly". I ask her to explain what makes her ugly, "She doesn't look like what I thought she would look like at all. She doesn't look Asian." Justin says, "But she's *half* Asian." We begin an analysis of various students we know who are mixed and their "racial" characteristics. I describe two sixth graders, one of Eurasian and one of full European ancestry whom I confuse. Even though their looks are distinctly different and one has Asian characteristics like dark hair, dark eyes, and browner skin, I am constantly interchanging their names. Jessica suggests the style of their dress and hair may supersede their physical differences.

This discussion leads to an analysis of the "China dolls," the twin daughters of a family in Patty's mother's circle of friends. Jessica comments, "They look like 'China



dolls'; they look really Chinese. Their skin is really white. Have you ever gone to Chinese funerals? They have like perfect sleek, black hair. I don't see how people could always have hair like that cause mine is really like puffy." Mei describes the color as "raven's wing black." Is this a cultural expression or did she create the analogy? There is a general discussion about hair color, and the relative merits of black hair vs. dark brown hair. Jessica says, "I think it's like an insult to have not black hair, cause nowadays kids dye their hair, but my parents say that I'm unhealthy because my hair isn't totally black." Susan says that she has been unsuccessful at changing her hair color:

Susan: It never turns any other color except for black.

Jessica: That's really cool, though, because your parents know you're Asian.

Susan: I don't like it though. (referring to her dye resistant hair)

Marie talks about how her hair color changed when she used to swim a lot and she got blond streaks. I ask if they would consider dyeing and if so, why? Some answer yes, some no.

SG: Why do people have to do these things to themselves to look different?

Marie: Because they want to look white.

Jessica: Because of neighbors and things.

Laurie tells a story that her mother told her about knowing someone in China who was blond and was referred to by a word that loosely translates as "mongrel". They also mention that large eyes and "big tits" will also elicit this appellation.

I ask, "So what is a mongrel?" This question is not answered. I ask them if they can tell people of different Asian nationalities apart and share a story about visiting a mountain shrine in Japan with some Japanese colleagues. A tour bus pulled up and a group of people descended. "Chinese tourists," said one of my colleagues

condescendingly. I looked closely at the people but could not distinguish any particular differences from the majority of the other Asian tourists.

Jessica: If you smile, right, and eyelids crease, if the crease goes down, you're Chinese, if the crease goes up you're Japanese, and if it goes straight, you're white.

SG: All right, let's try it.

There's general laughter, because, in fact, creasing turn out to be a much more individual characteristic.

Jessica: Well maybe it's Korean.

Laurie: With my sister, it goes both ways, like a fish. (laughter)

Justin: It's really embarrassing if you're tan if you're Asian.

Jessica: Everybody wants the *white* beauty.

Susan: "Yeah, bleaching parties.

The participants all agree that dark skin is associated with being lower class; tan is akin to being dirty. They refer to Asian T.V. shows where a girl is outside all day and her skin is still white. Marie mentions the use of powder to give the appearance of whiteness. Part of the allure of the 'China dolls' described in the book is their white skin. Laurie brings the conversation back to hair by talking about her mother's surfing YouTube and hearing an Asian woman putting down other Asians for having "blue" hair. Mei tells about her "part Asian" tutor who talked about Asians' hair being greasy and full of flakes because they don't wash it everyday, and then another white tutor responding, "I don't wash my hair everyday." This elicits laughter from the group, perhaps because a European American interceded on their behalf. An extended conversation ensues about hair washing—frequency, duration, etc., with everyone talking at once.

Third Book Discussion Group Meeting

*Inclusion and Exclusion: "It Doesn't Have to Do with Anything Except Coolness"*

In this section of the book, Patty leaves to go to a summer math program at Stanford University. Patty has been hiding her math abilities because she sees them as stereotypically Asian. Most of the students are in different places in the book. Susan and Justin finished it after the first meeting; Winston stopped reading after the last meeting. Laurie is the only student who is right on top of the assigned reading so the group suggests she review the events in the section. Laurie says, "She has a roommate from L.A. who tells her that being half is cool." This reminds Jessica of a memorable scene involving Patty's mother's pulling things out of her suitcase at the airport because the bag is too heavy. Marie says, "If it was my mom at the airport, she'd probably do that, too." Jessica is reminded of her mother because of the way Patty's mother is "pushing through everyone, being really rude." I ask them how they react to the racist remark a woman makes.

Justin: Smack her.

Jessica: Yeah!

SG: Why would she say that? How does she know she [Patty's mother] was even born in China?

Jessica: Oh, you can tell by the clothes and the way they talk.

Marie: And by what they do. Shoving through things is really Chinese.

SG: How many generations does that last?

They think only one, but then they make a distinction between Chinese who are really assertive ("She has no shame," "They're punk...They're not shy,") versus Chinese Americans who are not. Mei asks if white people who are assertive are in a different category, "If you're Chinese they'll look down on you and if you're white, wouldn't people look up to you?" Justin says, "If white people say a racist joke they get cursed out,

but if an Asian says a racist joke they just laugh.” Marie gives the example of a white being humiliated by losing a physical competition to an Asian because Asians “are supposed to be small and shrimpy.” However, it becomes clear that the situation changes where Asians are a majority. For example, Justin says he hears Asians teasing other Asians who lose points in basketball to a white.

SG: Is that because whites aren’t supposed to be good in basketball?

Justin: Not at this school. It’s a mostly Asian school.

SG: What about black kids? They’re fewer of them at the school.

Justin: But they’re still good.

Marie: Everyone is trying to be like them. Justin is showing the rappers on his tee shirt. I’m not saying that we’re trying to be, but you’re influenced to wear clothes like that.

SG: Does it go beyond clothes?

Jessica: Sometimes it’s like talking...Asianonics. (I think she’s adapting the concept of Ebonics).

Justin: Music.

I ask how many of them play music; with the exception of Winston, they are all in band or orchestra classes which emphasizes mainly classical or popular Western music. In the six years I have been teaching at the school, I have not heard a concert that included Asian or Asian influenced music. Marie remarks that even if they hear a Japanese composer, a European American has done the arrangement. Justin is confused by the word “Western” thinking it refers to cowboys.

The participants’ prefer to listen to rap. I wonder if they are being influenced to listen to rap because of identification with youth culture. Some of them have heard of the Chinese rapper, Jin. The others are incredulous, but Justin has his album, which he offers to bring in for us to listen to. I ask if there is anything different about Chinese rap. Justin, who is the most interested in the music (he owns both CDs), says for him it’s about the

beat. I ask if Jin is Chinese, Chinese American, or some other nationality and Justin says he is “ABC” which he immediately translates for me, American Born Chinese.

The conversation turns to where the students were born, and the girls are surprised to learn that both Justin and Winston were born in Hong Kong. When I ask them if they categorize the two boys as FOBs, they laugh raucously. Justin says to Winston, “You *brag* about being a FOB for God’s sake,” Winston responds, “Who me? I don’t do that.” The girls qualify the way FOBs are annoying. “If they know and they don’t care then they’re all right, but if they think they’re cool...” I ask, “So [Justin and Winston] know they’re not cool?” More laughter. Personalizing the labels causes embarrassment. Marie says, “We don’t mean that...we don’t mean that.” Before the group came together Winston and Justin did not associate much with the girls. Jessica had a friendship with both Susan and Marie, but the two of them were not especially close. Laurie was probably the least socially accepted of all, and Mei was also more of an independent.

Jessica: If they came here when they were like twelve they’d probably be more like dyed hair and ...

Mei: Well I don’t know ...people consider FOBs to be different things. yeah.

SG: So they’re not fresh enough? (gales of laughter)

I keep pushing them to define FOB in terms of time in the country, age of arrival, or any other criteria. Finally, Marie sums it up, “ It doesn’t have to do with anything except coolness.” Laurie describes “fobbyness” in terms of being “adjusted,” which might be synonymous with acculturated. This launches yet another conversation about fashion, this time on shopping in Hong Kong for Western designer clothing. They debate whether the products are real or “fake” (knockoffs). Jessica says, “You have to have some old person yell at them, ‘Why you take my money, huh...?’” An adolescent alone

will not be able to rectify a bad deal, whether due to lack of language ability, social capital, or both.

I ask, “Have you noticed that every time we start talking about culture, you guys bring up shopping?” Marie says, “That’s because we’re girls.” Everyone laughs, and I respond, “That’s clearly not true.” I point out Justin is a fashion expert; he had promised to create a guide to the ins and outs of the designer jeans world for me.

*Labeling: Eggs, Twinkies, Bananas, and More Alphabet Soup*

I bring the conversation back to the FOB/ABC dichotomy by asking the boys to react, “So now it’s your turn to talk about ABCs—the “enemy.” The girls laugh at my terminology. Justin shakes his head “no,” Winston nods his head “yes.” Marie says, “We’re all Chinese.” One thing that irks Winston is that ABCs don’t know their heritage language. The students attempt to distinguish between whites who are European American, naming some of the students in their class, and “white” students who are Asian. Jessica at one point refers to Koreans as white. At first this elicits a reaction of surprise from the group until she defends her statement by explaining they don’t generally associate with their own people.

Their question is then turned back to me. They want to know if I can tell who was born in the U.S. or who is a native speaker. I say that I begin by assuming that everyone was born here and speaks English until I find out differently. I tell them that I am still confused by their definitions of who is a FOB because they keep changing. Marie interjects, “Isn’t that labeling?” She continues, “If we like them we’re not gonna label them and if we don’t like them we’re gonna label them.” I then turn it around and ask the boys if they would label the girls negatively. Winston says no. Jessica says, “I think it’s

the ones that speak all English and even their parents were born here or something, and some of their parents, they didn't pay attention so they won't know, just like us, and eventually they're just, (her voice drops) white."

I find it interesting that Jessica identifies a generational difference in her analysis. She is able to see that her own experience is similar to the experience of the parents of her third generation peers, which is a mature perspective for a fourteen year old. She suggests "eggs" as an analogy for those acculturated individuals, but the others dispute the term as actually the opposite. Are there white students who would be labeled eggs in Hong Kong or the European communities in China? The other participants jokingly bring up other terms used to describe ABCs: "Twinkies," "bananas." They try to explain the difference to Jessica, pointing out that banana is a more fitting metaphor. Extending the metaphor, Jessica says, "But some bananas are bruised."

Justin brings up another current label, AZN. I have seen the term positively used in Asian activist literature; it reminds me a little of the way the Latino community uses the term 'Raza'. They associate it with text messaging which is probably more accurate. Mei says she sees it in screen names, but usually accompanied by another descriptor such as "little," "lil'," "hottie," "cutie," "sexy," "jagged" or have one or more Xs. It rankles both Jessica and Mei that Asians seem to stereotype themselves by those choices. It's interesting also, that this group is comfortable using the word Asian as an identifier rather than Chinese. Justin says, "Mine [screen name] is nothing like that; it's boomshakalakaboom" (Justin also identifies as a drummer).

This topic leads to a question about their communication with people in Asia. All but one say they keep in touch with their cousins through email. It also leads them to an analysis of cultural differences. Laurie says:

In China, if you talk to someone who's a guy and the girl keeps on responding, it means she has an interest in him, but over here... it just means they're good friends. And I didn't know that, and then like my mom, she found out I was emailing my cousin's friend and she got real mad at me and made me stop...and I didn't know why.

Justin seems to disagree with Laurie's interpretation, but brings up the point that his uncle has better grammar than he does even though he doesn't know that much English. I comment that it would be interesting to study cross cultural email etiquette. Trying to frame another question about these differences, I have to establish nomenclature. I ask, "So you're all Chinese American, can I say that?" Mei says, "But we don't like saying the whole long word Chinese American, we just say Chinese." I ask them about their experiences as Americans in China. Winston says, "My uncle in Hong Kong calls me a white guy." However, Justin thinks it has to do with language, "Because I speak fluent Chinese, they don't really notice." The conversation then turns to Americans who go to China and buy tee shirts, or in one case, get a tattoo with derogatory phrases because they don't understand the writing.

We go back to discussing the book. In reviewing the chapter I say that Patty is good at geometry but doesn't want to admit it. Mei says, "Don't you think that Oceanview is like a middle school version of Academic High School (the highly competitive college preparatory high school in San Francisco whose enrollment is about 50% Asian American) and that people here don't make fun of you if you're smart that



much like probably at other schools?" Susan responds, "But Oceanview kids don't kill themselves if they don't get an A+."

There is a common perception of frequent suicides at Academic. I ask how much truth lies in this perception. Justin says that his brother, who had gone there, knew one person who had taken his life. He went on to say that his brother had been offered drugs while a student there. One day he was sick and kept rubbing his runny nose, so another student offered him cocaine. I interject that every high school has drugs. Justin says that there are drugs at Oceanview as well. He also says that some students drink alcohol.

*In Group/Out Group Relationships: "If You Marry a White Girl, You'll Eat Pizza  
Everyday."*

In the section that they have just read, Patty develops a crush on a "hot" Asian boy in the program. It is the first time she has had a romantic interest in an Asian. The exchange that follows is typical of boy/girl teasing in middle school across ethnicities.

Jessica: I'm trying to picture a hot Asian guy but I can't.

Winston: You're looking at one.

SG: Can you picture any "hot" guys your age? (The girls shake their heads). How about older boys?

Marie: Guys who aren't our age aren't cool...they're all talking about stuff we don't really get.

SG: What about the guys. Do you know any "hot" Asian girls?

The boys both accuse each other of looking at girls in the yearbook and commenting on their "hotness". Winston has already talked about how his mother would not allow him to marry outside his "race." Both boys have said that they see themselves having Asian girlfriends because they would "understand" them better. However, ethnicity has not come up yet in this discussion. Marie says, "I think all parents want you to marry inside the race." I drop a little hint about a scene coming up when Patty's

mother “goes [equally] crazy” hearing about Patty’s Taiwanese boyfriend and her aunt’s black partner. Justin and Susan have already read that section, but the others sound very surprised that Patty’s mother’s sister is in a relationship with an African American.

Winston says ever since seventh grade, his mother has been telling him his girlfriends must be Asian. I ask the girls how their parents would react.

Marie: They don’t want me to date. Maybe in college.

Justin: *College?* My mom asks me about it [dating] and I tell her.

Jessica: My mother doesn’t really care.

SG: Who brings up the topic?

Jessica: They bring it up. They tell my brother, “Don’t bring a white girl home.” Kind of stereotypical, “If you marry a white girl, you’ll eat pizza everyday.”

Marie: They’re just like, “You’re gonna screw up your life.” I have to concentrate on getting to school, then getting a job, then getting my own money, then I can do that.

I ask whether their parents’ experiences were the same or different. Marie tells a story about her father when he was a student in China. A girl wrote him a letter about how much she liked him. He took a red pen, corrected the grammar, and handed it back. “That’s why he’s a school person...that was the lesson.” Justin clarifies, “If you give a love letter, use the right grammar.”

### *The “Good at Math” Stereotype*

I ask if they have ever experienced the embarrassment Patty has about her math ability’s reflecting a stereotype. Marie has already expressed that there is little negative peer pressure against high academic achievement at Oceanview, which may not be true at other schools. Since Patty is in high school I ask whether they anticipate any differences in high school.

Marie: I think they’ll just stop acting like really smart. They’ll just be really quiet and do their work and stuff. Like after the test they won’t be, ‘Oh my God, what did you get.’ SG: Why do you think this will change?

Jessica: I don't think I will participate as much because like...you call attention to yourself, you know...not in the beginning at least. People will be like "Oh, she thinks she's so smart."

I ask if this is also a problem in eighth grade. Year after year I have noticed, as have other teachers, that many of those irrepressible sixth graders have suddenly gone silent, and in language arts it is almost impossible to get a discussion going involving more than two or three students. Susan says, "Like in the beginning nobody likes to talk because they're scared people will say, 'What a know-it-all.'"

I mention that Marie in sixth grade was "Miss Participation", but in eighth grade she rarely speaks.

Justin: We're secretive.

Marie: We're being rebellious.

SG: So how should a teacher deal with this?

Susan: Just deal with it in the beginning. Or you can put them in small groups...they would talk more.

She's absolutely right. I have noticed lively conversations happening in their class book groups in the absence of an adult. They even spontaneously take charge of facilitation. They warn me not to put students in groups with their enemies because they won't talk. I express surprise that there are enemies, "I thought you all got along." They tell me that they find some people "irritating." We discuss how boys fight and get it out of their systems but girls nurse their dissatisfaction.

Jessica: It's a girl thing.

Justin: Yeah, guys just confront.

Marie (in a high voice): "Do I have like a split hair?"

## Final Book Discussion Group Meeting

*Media*

The topic is television viewing. Some of the girls are interested in soap operas, as well as Chinese reality shows. Susan is absent that day. Laurie doesn't watch T.V. at all. Instead she gets her entertainment through the Internet. The others have access to four or five Asian-oriented channels on cable television. Mei watches T.V. with her parents who only watch the Asian channels. She mentions that the Twelve Girls Band was on PBS the past weekend. It was the first time she had heard of an Asian performance on PBS. Marie is only allowed to watch T.V. on the weekend, so she watches what her dad watches: Asian T.V., *Cops*, and the Discovery Channel (presenting mainly science-related documentaries). Mei says the shows from Mainland China are really slow as opposed to the Hong Kong shows. They tell me about one where a girl pretends to be a boy so she can go to school. Winston watches *Comedy Central* and the news with his parents if he watches T.V. at all. He says he just stares at the screen but doesn't really pay attention to what they're saying. His dad makes him sit and watch it but doesn't discuss it with him. Justin watches ESPN (a sports station), especially for basketball, MTV (popular music videos), and BET (Black Entertainment Television). He watches the Asian channels on Sunday. Jessica watches cooking shows, crime shows. When I say I know the director of *Law and Order*, the girls get very excited. I tell them that his daughter is half Chinese, Jessica says, "His wife is white? I mean, I mean Asian?"

## The Interviews

*Winston: "I'm Like Full Chinese."*

Winston begins by telling me the book group was "cool" but he didn't like the book "that much." He found it boring because it talks about "girl stuff." Originally, I hadn't planned on having boys involved in the study but had invited them per Jessica and Marie's request. He agrees that Justin, in contrast, liked the book. When I ask if he can specify his objections, he says, "They make a big deal out of something small," and cites the incident with "toxic" soup as an example. His mom makes a similar soup everyday, and he doesn't think it tastes "that nasty." He comments that since he's so used to it, it doesn't faze him. He refers to the herbalist in the book as the "fortune teller," and asks why she had to drink the soup. I say it's because she's not Asian enough. He questions my interpretation: "That's really weird because I don't think any fortune teller would tell you that, 'You're not Asian enough; you're not white enough.'" So I clarify, "Well, that's how Patty's character interprets it. Her mom might have said, 'She's not obedient enough, she does whatever she wants to do, she's not a good girl.'" Winston relates to this. "My mom thinks if I go to an acupuncturist, like they will put some needles in me, like they will make me more obedient and stuff. But I don't think it works. For her, it makes her feel worse." I say, "I wonder about that because it seems like she's having it for the first time, and her mother seems so traditional, like she practices everything they would do in China." Winston qualifies, "Well she's from Taiwan. It's kinda different." He doesn't seem to want to explore this anomaly so I try a different approach, "When you have kids, do you think you would give them that soup." "The only good thing about

that soup is that it doesn't have any side effects and stuff...and it gets you better." We begin to discuss the effectiveness of the soup and I ask where he gets it.

Winston: (incredulously: You *wanna* try it?

SG: Why not?

Winston (cautioning): Only if you're really sick. But sometimes they fake it or they suck at it.

SG: Just like Western doctors.

When we get back to the subject of whether he would give this medicine to his children he says he would, then qualifies, "Well, I would let them have a choice first. I would let them try both [Western and Chinese medicine] first to see which one works better for them." I ask whether the children will know that's it's good for them and what he would do if they resist even though he knows it's really good. He starts talking about how difficult it is to prepare this soup, "That's why my mom always gets mad at me when I'm sick. So it's easier if I do let them take the Western medicine for me, and it goes the same for them, but if they don't like the side effects and stuff." This seems to follow the usual trajectory from first generation to third generation in terms of embracing the heritage culture (Tuan, 1998). Even though the preparation is arduous, Winston's mother continues the tradition, but he is willing to dispense with it because "it is easier." I mention that Western medicine has never found a cure for the common cold. "Well," he says, "when I have a cold my mom just takes me to the Chinese doctor, and he makes something up for me, and I feel better." Then he explains that it takes a week to get better. I explain that colds usually last a week, no matter want you take or don't take. He says that he takes it because his parents "tell me it works."

The assignment the teacher gives Patty to write her autobiography is another example Winston cites as “making a big deal out of things.” I explain that while he finds it easy to tackle most assignments many students really struggle with them.

SG: But the author is showing it’s a big conflict for Patty to be European American and Chinese American.

Winston: Well, yeah, I would never know how she feels cause I’m like full Chinese and she’s...half and half.

SG: You say that you’re full Chinese and yet you’re an American citizen. What does it mean to be “full Chinese” and an American citizen?

Winston: Well. Full Chinese...well I don’t really think about that cause, I mean, I just live here and go to an American school, and have American friends.

SG: When you say American friends do you mean, European American or Chinese American or all of the above?”

Winston: All of the above.

SG: A lot of the students I talk to mean blond, blue-eyed people when they say American.

Winston: I think they’re the same kind of. I don’t really look at them for their hair or eyes.

SG: Do you think most people do?

Winston: Probably. Sometimes, some of my friends, they say, “Hey look there goes that white guy.” Well, sometimes I do that too. But, like I don’t think it really matters that much.

SG: Does it matter to some of your friends?

Winston: Yeah.

SG: Why?

Winston: Well, not a lot of Asian kids really hang out with the group of white kids, except for a few like [a popular third generation girl I had interviewed earlier who wrote that she felt she was not acceptable to her culture]. Yeah, we just hang out with our own kind. But then I still see those people like my friend, like Sam [a Russian American boy in the class].

His statement echoes another Chinese American girl’s comment after she completed an assignment mapping how students group themselves in the schoolyard at lunch, “I never realized that people separate by race.”

I comment that Winston wrote on his survey he felt more comfortable spending time with Asian Americans. “Well it’s this funny feeling when you’re the only Asian guy

in like a group of white kids.” I wonder whether it goes the other way for white kids and I ask if there are any white kids who hang out with his group. He says that during lunch they play basketball in a mixed group including African Americans. I ask if he’d feel comfortable visiting the home of one of the African American kids. “Not really...I’ve never been really a friend to one of them. ‘Cause most of them at school that I know of, they’re mostly ghetto [a style of dressing, speaking, and behaving associated with lower or working class urban African Americans] and stuff. And they’re not like Justin ghetto, they’re like different, they’re more hard core.” He recognizes that Justin likes to adopt an African American style, but it’s fairly superficial.

SG: What does hard core mean to you?

Winston: Well like, they swear a lot.

SG: And Justin doesn’t swear a lot?

Winston: He swears a lot, too, but I understand what he means, cause I’m Asian, too. And he doesn’t swear in like every sentence and some African Americans do.

He concedes that there is one African American who doesn’t swear in every sentence and he feels more comfortable with that student. I ask about the white kids. He says he doesn’t like the “skater” style. One boy is an exception because he has known him since elementary school and considers him a friend. He says he doesn’t associate with the others because he doesn’t know how to skate. “Different interests?” I suggest. He nods.

I ask, “Do you think teachers should do more work on helping kids understand each other?” He says it’s too general a question.

SG: How would you interpret it?

Winston: Yes, cause it could help the relationships between students in the school and that might make it better for people like the people, like the Asians who hang out in white groups or the other way around. And maybe we would get to know more friends, which is good.



I ask if we have already done anything in class to address the issue or if he has other suggestions. He responds that the class is not as diverse as it could be. “It doesn’t have any African Americans.” I say, “One half.” “Oh, Eliza, but she’s cool, she’s not really ghetto.” We get on the subject of “ghetto”. I suggest that sometimes students don’t act ghetto in a classroom because the teacher wouldn’t want them to. Surprisingly, Winston says that he doesn’t think a teacher would care, and that a lot of his friends are ghetto. Is he referring to language or clothing? Justin dresses “ghetto” but certainly doesn’t use swear words in class. However, Winston and Justin have just completed a short movie they showed the class in which Justin plays a rapper who talks in black dialect—a very different persona from his usual polite, quiet classroom personality.

We discuss the character that Justin created for their second movie, a “porn star” closely modeled on the speech and body language of African American rappers. It was unclear whether it was supposed to be a parody or a tribute. Their original assignment was to take an advertisement and expose the hype, or propaganda, behind it. Their group took the assignment in such a different direction it was almost impossible to recognize, but their result certainly revealed a great deal about their views of media. I ask where the “porn star” character came from since Winston has just referred to Justin as “ghetto.” In the movie, Justin uses the word “nigga” several times. Did Winston notice what happened in the class when Justin said that word? Winston replies, “I know, he shouldn’t have said that.” Did the group know that he was going to use that term? Winston says, “I think it’s OK. I guess. If we were showing it to a lot of adults like [the principal] or [the most senior female member of the faculty], I wouldn’t want to show that.”

I'm not sure whether to be flattered or offended that they feel comfortable exhibiting the underworld of their imaginations in my class. I mention that Justin had his head down during the entire showing of the film and remind him this wasn't the case during the first film they made (*Twilight Chinatown*, their final project for *Child of the Owl*, inspired by Anna Deavere Smith's performance in *Twilight Los Angeles, 1992*). I contrast his response with the pride Susan and Jessica expressed while sharing their first movie to a graduate seminar at the university. Winston responds, "Well....'cause maybe they didn't say anything that makes them look bad, but Justin, he said all this crazy stuff. Plus he's a porn star [in the film] so may people would think that would make him look bad or he would think that people..." His voice trails off.

Back to the question about activities that would help students understand each other, Winston says that making a movie created a bond between the participants because they had to work together, "You know when you do homework, you can just copy off of your partner? But then if you make a movie you can't really copy. You copy the scripts, like what people want to say in it, you still have to act it out." I ask if this addresses the goal of helping people understand each other. "Well," he responds, "you could make a movie about cultures, I guess," adding that the groups should be diverse.

Our discussion moves on to the topic of exploring gender diversity when there isn't cultural diversity. I tell him that I wish we had time to read a different story, *China Boy* by Gus Lee, giving him a brief summary to interest him, but he says he prefers science fiction to true stories. He tells me he liked *The Giver*, a book we had finished recently about a utopian community gone sour, but that some other people in the group preferred *Nothing But the Truth (and a Few White Lies)*. He says the ending of the book

confused him because the author had portrayed the main character as ugly, but at the end she had gained confidence in herself. I ask if confidence makes people automatically appear attractive and he agrees.

I'm still curious about why the author picked certain aspects of Chinese culture to highlight as negative. Winston says that those were probably the events that she didn't like in her life. "She's trying to tell other people that it's bad." I propose that the author may associate with white people and see things from their point of view, like the third generation Chinese American girls we discussed earlier. Winston says, "Yeah, maybe, cause I think [she] is really kinda whitewashed, cause then she hangs out with white people, how she talks, and how she acts. You can tell if you really hang out with her." I ask if he thinks she's always that way. He says, "I think she's just herself which is kind of whitewashed." He is probably conflating Patty's character with the author. At that moment bell rings terminating the interview

*Justin's Interview: "I Like to Be Like Bold, I Want to Be Like Myself"*

Justin is very reserved during this interview, speaking in hushed tones and answering questions in short phrases. I begin by explaining I'm trying to find out which class activities he enjoyed so I would be sure to repeat them in subsequent years. He answers, "Chinatown movie." I point out that the group chose the book that inspired the project, but students next year might not pick it. Then he says that he didn't like the book that much; he preferred *Nothing but the Truth (and a Few White Lies)*. "It connected better, I guess." What did you connect with? "I guess, parents, ...and uh, I don't know. It was like realistic." I suggest, "Humorous?" "Yeah."

I say that Winston found Patty's reaction to her mother strange, rather than realistic, and ask him to elaborate. "Well, like all mothers hassle you, too, like for your own good, and ...they won't try to harm you. I understand that she's doing it for Patty's own good. That's basically it (small laugh)." Justin is having a really hard time expressing what he wants to say about the book. However, I also feel a certain resoluteness coming from him to try to power through his discomfort. I get the sense that he is always walking in the shadow of his older brother, and while he appreciates an adult who is interested in what he has to say, he's unaccustomed to the attention. I try to rescue him, "Well, you said you connected with it. Did you connect with the way the mother treated her daughter?" "Yeah, like, I guess she works really hard, but then, um, ...well, I have to drink that stuff. Of course, it's only for when I get sick." I say that her mother felt Patty was sick in a way because she wasn't obedient. ""And I never had the fortune teller thing" I ask if he feels a lot of pressure from his parents. "...Not really. Not as much as...well like... what Winston feels from his parents. Cause his is really strict." I ask him about the remark he made about Patty's mother not wanting her...'Why did she have kids?' "Well she was in college. I really don't think you want kids in college...during college. So then she didn't really expect that...or one of them." I say I wanted to do interviews because everybody had a really different sense of the book.

SG: Anything else ring true for you...that made you feel this is a really good book for kids to read?

Justin: Well, I feel like the independence, like when she goes to math camp.

SG: In what ways do you identify with that independence.

Justin: Like I can go to trips with friends, like out of town trips like for a week."

He has gone to L.A. and Tahoe, “things like that” with friends of his, not of his family. “But then my parents like know them.” I ask if they know the kid’s parents, and whether they make sure they know the kids’ parents before they can go.

Justin: They talk to them on the phone.”

SG: Do you think teachers need to have cultural information about their students, like child raising practices?

Justin: Yeah, because you can connect with them better.

He mentions that teachers should know about race and culture. I’m surprised by his inclusion of the word race so I ask what he thinks teachers should know about race.

He goes silent for a long time so I finally break it.

SG: I’m not sure how race would matter.

Justin: Like some Asian people, they don’t know how to speak Chinese so it doesn’t really matter anyway.

I wonder if he means that teachers stereotype based on race, assuming all Asians speak an Asian language.

SG: Is language about race or is it about culture?

Justin: Um...culture?...Keep it alive or keep your culture.

SG: Do you believe that?

Justin: Well, you shouldn’t like lose it...I mean you could not like...um, you don’t have to be like...really forget your own language, like your...like besides English, cause you like speak it everyday but then like your language at home, you should still pass it to your children.

SG: You would do that?

Justin: Yeah.

SG: Would you make your kids go to Chinese school if they didn’t want to?

Justin: Yeah...No, I wouldn’t make them, but I would sort of like teach them...I wouldn’t like make them.

I explain to him that my father refused to teach me his first language and insisted that I speak English. He responds, “Well isn’t like China like industrial and like advancing?” I think that children are being advised about the social and economic capital that speaking Chinese will afford them. I ask if he’d want to have a job where he goes

back and forth between here and China. “Do you mean like actually go there? Mmm, not really. I don’t really want to work in Asia. Like I guess Hong Kong is good because I actually like know it...and I feel like safe there but I don’t feel safe in other parts of China. Cause it’s still too poor.”

I should have asked Justin why he associates poverty and danger but I change the subject and ask him about the “porn star” character he played in the last movie they made

SG: What made you chose that character?

Justin: Because they gave it to me. It was Winston’s idea to do pornography.

SG: Why did you have your head down the whole time?

Justin: I don’t like to watch myself on T.V.

SG: I didn’t see the character as a porn star.

Justin: I don’t really know any.

SG: You were more like a black rapper.

Justin: That was Winston’s suggestion. He said my side job would be like a rapper.

It’s interesting that they associate pornography and rap. Justin is carrying a thick book written by a Chinese American on the history of rap so I know this is a consuming interest of his. “Winston came up with it and I just went along.” Neither boy wants to take responsibility for the character. I say, that Winston told me he had improvised the lines. “Well, he told me to and I said yes.

We move to the topic of stereotyping, and I ask if he has felt stereotyped.

Justin: Yes, Asians are supposed to be good at math.

SG: Are you?

Justin: Sometimes, but not like an A student.

SG: What kinds of people tell you you’re supposed to be good at math?

Justin: White people.

SG: Teachers?

Justin: Students.

SG: Do you feel resentful?

Justin: Well, a lot of Asian people actually take extra tutors for math and stuff. Asian people want better advantage for their children.

The discussion moves to his interest in the criminal underworld in Chinatown and I tell him about Eddie Zheng, a former gang member who become a model prisoner, poet, and worked to turn other gang members around. Justin has heard of him. “I read this book recently...it’s called *Chinese Playground* but then it’s like about the underworld. It was like in the 80s and then he talked about the shooting at Silicon Valley, I’m not sure where that was. There was a comparison between them.” I tell him about a youth worker that got shot trying to help gang members transition out of gangs. “I know about that. Cause he was going to go on the radio and broadcast something. He threatened to tell their secrets if they did like a cease fire or something.” I think he means if they didn’t agree to a cease-fire.

SG: Would you be interested in working with gang members?

Justin: I’m not really into the gangs. I was just reading about it or like knowing about it but I don’t really want to interact with them.

SG: What is the attraction?

Justin: I can relate to it and it’s illegal which makes it more interesting, I guess.

SG: What part of you relates to it?

Justin: It’s the Asian part.

When I push him to tell me more, he can’t. So I say that he’s the first student I’ve met at Oceanview who has expressed an interest in this kind of activity and that his papers are often provocative; pushing the limits of what is acceptable. He responds, “I like to be like bold, I want to be like myself. Some people, they’re like changing for other people. I would change, but then, not for just one person.”

He has brought a book to the interview, *Total Chaos* by Jeff Chang (2006). “It’s kinda weird, by an Asian guy.” I tell him I’ve heard Chang interviewed on an African American talk show on Pacifica Radio and learned he’s one of the most respected hip hop historians.

SG: Is that something you'd like to pursue as a career. "

Justin: Yeah, well, I like music (he plays percussion). I'm not really into rap right now...I like the old school where they actually like talk stuff where they're really lyrical.

SG: Are you interested in Youth Speaks and spoken word?

Justin: Like a poem? Yeah.

SG: Your poem was so good. Have you written more?

Justin: Not really (laugh).

SG: Would you think about doing more writing like that?

Justin: Now I would

I tell Justin about my experience playing drums in a rock n' roll band when few women were drummers. "I just want to like break the stereotype," he says. However, he doesn't hang out with people who are not of his race.

Justin: I would, but then I don't know any, really. I know like some [there are several in his classes] but I haven't really gotten like close to them.

SG: Would you want to?

Justin: Yeah, I guess so.

SG: What stops you?

Justin: Well, I'm thinking of hanging out with Andy this weekend.

SG: Are you going to play music (Andy is also a musician and songwriter).

Justin: No. (laughs)

SG: How did you become friendly with him?

Justin: I knew him in band and then I talked more in language arts, and then gym the next period."

SG: How can I help students form friendships with those from different backgrounds.

Justin: (with no hesitation): Mix up the groups and like make sure they talk.

SG: So should I make sure that you and Wilson don't end up in a group together?

(We both laugh)

SG: Would you hate that?

Justin: No, not really.

SG: I've mainly let you choose your own partners.

Justin: 'Cause if you choose, you're just going to go with the same people again and again."



*Marie's Interview: "You just know that you have to do and you do it."*

My first question to Marie is about her experience with the book discussion group. "It was fun because you meet all these people whose families are just like ours, because sometimes you're like yours is the only family that like all their beds are in one room and you don't have your own room but it's not true cause there are people like that." Marie's mother, I have learned earlier, works at a hotel in the downtown area so I imagine she may be referring to her own living situation when she speaks of having to share a room. Her next statement clarifies that she is drawing an analogy between class differences and cultural differences, learning about the other families that have their children drink tonic soup "that's like really nasty and stuff, like a lot of other families do that too." I ask if she had known that before.

Marie: We don't really talk about drinking it, cause you drink it, that's it. It's not a big deal but it's kind of cool.

SG: One of my sixth graders brought me some soup last week when I had that cold.

Marie (incredulously): Was it good?

SG: Well, it was very curative. I got better right away.

Marie: Sometimes it's just like you don't know if it really works, but it makes your mom happy so...

SG: Should I have students read the book again?

Marie: Yeah, 'cause you can relate to it. I think the mixing is good because like right now she's mixed because like her mom's Chinese and her dad's white, but since we live in America we're all kinda half white."

Marie was one of the students in my sixth grade class when this conversation came up two years earlier. She is apparently sticking by her original definition of white, as cultural/socioeconomic rather than racial. I remind her of the discussion and ask her if she still holds the same views. She says she can't remember what she said. I tell her I had reread the papers recently and she wrote that she wasn't white because her family is Chinese. "Well, that's what my dad always told me. You're not white because you're

always Chinese.” Her words are somewhat contradictory here because she has just implied that all Americans are “kinda white.

Marie: It’s like you don’t forget where you’re from.

SG: Tell me about the American part, because education is supposed to create “good American citizens”, so if you tell me that you’re Chinese then what does that mean in terms of your being an American citizen?

Marie: We were born here so we have to like, huh...American culture you have to kinda have to adopt as your own because you kinda live here so yeah, I guess.

SG: Do you ever feel resistant like you don’t want to adopt American culture?

Marie: My parents feel that way. Well, it’s not fair cause if everyone else has it then you’re excluded.

I wonder what this means since most of her other friends are Chinese American.

She says it depends on their generation.

Marie: Well, one of my friends, her parents were born here so she gets to do white things with her...well, she gets to hang out with her friends and all that sleepover kind of thing. But I guess if your parents were born in China they’re more protective, I guess.

SG: In what other ways are you affected by your parents being first generation?

Marie: They don’t speak English that well, I guess, and that means you kinda like have to translate for them. Now I can’t speak Chinese that well cause when I was little I used to be fluent, but my parents were like, “You shouldn’t. Even though you have to remember you’re Chinese, you have to learn to speak English real well, because this is your country”...and yeah, but now they want me to learn Chinese again, and I’m like, “Why didn’t you just make me learn Chinese, I would remember Chinese.”

I ask how she feels about being bilingual and if English gets in the way. She says that now in order to learn Chinese she needs instructions given in English, “But like now I go to a school where there’s like all Chinese people and they don’t translate so it’s just like nothing to grab on to.” She explains that she has a reading book and a workbook with related exercises. Marie is enrolled in a Mandarin school but her family speaks Cantonese.

Marie: My parents want me to learn Mandarin 'cause no one speaks Cantonese anymore, pretty much. My parents have this whole thing about one day you might want to move back to China and then you should know it.

SG: Do they want to move back to China?

Marie: No, they want to move to Texas and own a house. They want the whole American dream with the house.

SG: Why don't they want to stay in the area?

Marie: Because it's expensive and cold. Because my parents don't speak English they don't get that involved in my school so it's kinda nice.

When she was younger they helped her because they knew the material she was studying but after that she was on her own. She gives some background information on her parents. Marie's father is from Hong Kong and attended a Catholic school where he learned some English. Her mother is Chinese Vietnamese. She left Vietnam during the war and landed in Hong Kong. Several months earlier the class read and responded to an essay on the American Dream to set a context for literature on immigration and African American history. I was delighted Marie made a connection between the essay and her own life.

Was Marie familiar with the historical context of *Wooden Fish Songs* before reading the book? She says yes, but actually only knows about Chinese coming to California for gold in the 1850s. When I ask her when and where she learned about that history she says she read it in the eighth grade social studies book before it was assigned in class.

Marie: There's like a little chapter on like the people coming to the Gold Rush. There's like miners, the Chinese, and stuff like that.

SG: Do teachers pay enough attention to Chinese American culture?

Marie: Yeah, cause there's like all these translations and stuff. When they pass out Wednesday envelopes and the bulletin they always have a Chinese translation, and that's nice.

SG: Do you think you learn enough about your cultural background?

Marie: I think it's like better to keep it out cause like there's so many races that you don't want to focus all your attention on one or nothing like that. I

think that if you were to put China in it you're gonna have to put in a lot more like countries depending on your students.

I remind her that 50% of the students in my classes are Chinese American and ask if she thinks we should put more emphasis on learning about Chinese history and culture. She lobs the question back to me, "What would happen if we were to focus?" I explain that we had been doing that when we spent so much time reading a biographical novel whose main character is Chinese American.

SG: So when you go to high school and your teachers are reading mainly English literature, and European American literature, and maybe some African American literature, is that enough?

Marie: I think so, because when you're like a kid and you're just going to school and stuff you don't really pay attention to the choices. You just know that you have to do and you do it.

SG: But is that fair or right?

I'm displaying a clear bias here, but Marie has strong opinions; I know she won't cave in just because I'm pushing her. "I guess it's more interesting kind of....because you connect to stuff and then you learn new stuff about other cultures."

When I offered students a choice of four books, Mabel chose *Izzy Willy Nilly*, by Cynthia Voigt (1986), a book about a European American girl who becomes paralyzed during high school, while her close friends, Jessica and Susan chose *Child of the Owl*.

SG: But suppose teachers never teach about your culture?

Marie: You could ask the teacher (small laugh).

SG: Have you done that?

Marie (laughing): No.

SG: Why not?

Marie: No point.

SG: Because you already know?

Marie: I don't know... because like our whole class is Asian and stuff, well not all of it, so I guess the teachers already know that there's Asians in the class.

SG: Do you think your white teachers knew a lot about Asian cultures.

Marie: Yup. We celebrated Chinese New Year in that class.

SG: Has any teacher has explained things in terms of Chinese culture.

Marie: Well, like why would you need to do that because I just don't think that they collide too often, school and culture. It's easier to keep it separate.

SG: But hey do collide because school is mainly based on European American culture. Marie: They do? Well, the books all try to seem like not biased.

SG: Can you give me some specifics.

Marie: The history book

SG: What about novels? Aren't the characters mostly European American or European." Marie: (laughs) Yeah.

SG: Is that fair?"

Marie: I don't think it's unfair, cause there's white kids in the class too. I think because we live in America that's where white people are, well even though our whole country is immigrants, but it started out...

SG: Should recognizing cultures be dependent on numbers of people in each cultural group.

Marie: It seems like it's tied together kind of because like in Chinatown it's all Chinese people and if you open like a European restaurant there it wouldn't do so well.

I tell her my experience with going to Chinese restaurants where the menu, written in Chinese, was mainly meat and potatoes. She hasn't had those experiences because she goes to Dim Sum places when she goes out. She mentions an example of Chinese on Chinese discrimination: white tourists get the "really nice menu" and the Chinese customers get the paper menu, "because we know what we want." Although she says, "It's good to know other people's cultures so you can be sensitive about it," Marie is conscious about sticking to the "stuff we're supposed to learn in school."

SG: Who makes those decisions about what you're supposed to learn in school? Why shouldn't we have half the curriculum about Asia?

Marie: Cause the taxpayers wouldn't be happy.

SG: Your parents don't pay taxes?

She argues that if European American teachers taught about Asian cultures in school they would teach from a white perspective and might be biased. I ask how white teachers will ever become more knowledgeable about Asian cultures if they're never taught in school. She gives an example of how the Chinese teach about the Japanese in

World War II from a completely different perspective than the Japanese. I ask again if it's fair that Chinese American students have to go to a special school to learn about their culture while white students can just go to one school. "I don't know, I think it's OK" I tell her I disagree with her so she makes the point again that she doesn't want to exclude other cultures that should be taught. After some discussion she amends her idea to having a "majority of the minorities get taught." My last response is in reference to a discussion we had earlier in class.

SG: It's the whole 'America thing' playing into it again."

Marie: The whole America thing because like white people set up our school structure so they're gonna teach what they know best, but now that things are changing, I guess we should change with it, like our school should change with how many people are coming into it, cause we're pretty much staying with the same system we've had for two hundred years, I think.

*Jessica's Interview: "I'm part of the biggest race in the world."*

My first question for Jessica is to talk about her feelings about the book discussion group.

Jessica: Book group was fun. We got to talk about China and being Chinese. Because...oh, because usually we spend all that time making it seem like you're not that Chinese but you know in the group we had to...we did all those fake accents and stuff were fun. Because people know you're kidding. Because if you did it outside they'd probably think you actually talk like that. In sixth grade I didn't really care but like in seventh grade it depends on who your crowd is but if they like shop at all the American brands and be really like, you know how most of the second generation are? So, you kind of want to be with them and then like in eighth grade I didn't hang out with those people anymore, I hung out with Marie and we kidded around about Chinatown a lot. Then we got really Asian and we were like, "Uh, yeah, I eat rice everyday. I love rice. I do love rice."

SG: How much of this change is related to Marie and how much to our class focus?

Jessica: I think it's like...before I'd be like I didn't want to say anything that would make me sound really Asian but then... like what did you just say? "I hang out in Chinatown." Oh, cool (smiles). You know, you kinda

get over it. I mean before it was like, “I’ve never been to Chinatown.” But now it’s like, “Yeah, sometimes I go.”

I ask if it is her relationship with Marie that helped her overcome her fear of being stereotyped or the activities we did in class related to both breaking down stereotypes and recognizing the importance of Chinese contributions to mainstream American culture. She attributes her transformation to Marie’s influence.

It seems that the beginning of her friendship with Marie is concurrent with the launch of that text so I ask Jessica to talk more about the second look, *Wooden Fish Songs*, that we read in class.. She says that she didn’t really relate to the events in the book because they were historical rather than contemporary. The book “annoyed her.” Why? “I don’t know, like stuff that happened in it annoyed me. Like Gim Gong (the main character whose life is chronicled by the three women he was closest to, his Chinese peasant mother, his white American middle class mentor and his African American co-worker).” She says she can’t remember why she was annoyed but she goes on to say that she liked the ending.

Jessica: It’s not like a happy ending, like Sum Jue (Gim Gong’s mother) becomes some kind of princess.

SG: Did you know anything about that period of Chinese history?

Jessica: Yeah, it sounds like my mom’s. Poverty. Poverty.

SG: Did it make you uncomfortable to read about it?

Jessica: I can’t remember. I think I didn’t like the stereotypes, but I can’t remember...

SG: Talk about *Nothing but the Truth (and a Few White Lies*.

Jessica: It was cool....I can kinda relate to it except I’m not a hapa (mixed race half Asian, half European). Patty’s pretty much like Chinese ‘cause she doesn’t have any white in her...I mean white culture.

SG: Do you have any friends of other races like Patty has who put pressure on you to be less Chinese?

Jessica: Like Gloria? No, Gloria wants to be Asian. She likes to sing “Dim Sum Girl” (a popular song recorded by a Chinese American singer), and she likes to eat dim sum.”

SG: Was it easy for you to accept her?

Jessica: Yeah, I didn't hate her 'cause she was white.

SG: Gloria is actually Latina, so she might not be considered white.

Jessica: She's a lot of things, she's like Irish, too.

It turns out that Gloria's grandfather is one fourth Chinese. I ask if that makes a difference in terms of her acceptance among Asian Americans. She answers, "We don't feel comfortable with her because she's one ninth Asian, it's what...we're just close, you know. "Being at Oceanview they learn to love Asians," adding, "and our homeland is where they get all their manufactured goods.

The topic changes to her involvement with Chinese school. Oceanview is rented on Saturday by a Chinese school run by a neighborhood Buddhist temple. In fact, ironically, Jessica had been attending class in my classroom. Because she had started only recently she was placed in a class with much younger students, mainly second graders. "I quit. I can't learn it—it's too hard. I had to sit there like (she simulates confusion)." She speaks Cantonese, like the majority of her generation of San Francisco Chinese. The instruction is in Mandarin. I ask why she doesn't go to a Cantonese speaking school to learn how to read and write. She says, "Because Mandarin's more widely spoken and if you speak it you can understand it in Cantonese, too." She also feels like she is losing her Cantonese, for example she can't remember common words like "stove."

SG: Have you stopped speaking Cantonese with your parents?

Jessica: I used to be embarrassed to call my parents and talk in Chinese but now I'm like "Hello."

SG: How did that change come about?

Again she refers to the influence of a friend, Vivian, who speaks Vietnamese with her parents. Jessica then jokes that she is prone to peer pressure. "I'm scared. What if someone offers me a cigarette and I can't say no." However, from her ironic tone, I'm



sure she is joking, at least about this aspect of peer pressure. She terms herself a follower, but then admits that she wouldn't be influenced to take drugs. However, she is very conscious that the need to fit in has lead her to accept a lifestyle she is not really comfortable with, that of her seventh grade friends. I tell her that I see her as a person who is willing to take risks. One anti-stereotyping class activity involved boys and girls presenting scenes in which they took on roles as the opposite gender. Boys and girls presented their scenes separately, which were then critiqued by the other gender. At one point during the boys' presentation of girls, Jessica spontaneously inserted herself, in the role of a boy. It was hilarious and added a new dimension to the activity. She tells me that in sixth grade, she used to be "good" but she has recently been more impulsive. Jessica: First I'll just test the waters and if it's OK I'll keep doing it...I kinda feel bad about it.

SG: What do you think caused the change?

Jessica (without hesitation): Puberty."

SG: You're pushing limits now?

Jessica: Yeah, kinda getting in trouble, too,

She complains that others feel like she "looks like she can take a joke" so she's an easy target to pick on. In fact, she says, "It hurts inside."

I ask her to talk about her experience on a school field trip in Washington, D.C. She came rushing into my room at the first opportunity after her return to tell me that she had experienced blatant racism, both European American and Asian on Asian racism. Whites would speak very slowly to the predominantly Asian American group, assuming they didn't speak English or ask them where they had learned to speak English so well. She also mentioned seeing other Asian Americans sitting with a group of European Americans either turn away from them or look at them scornfully. In response, she relates

a story about going to Riverside, California to look at the university there and seeing a Chinese restaurant run by “a black guy.”

SG: Was that awkward?

Jessica: No it wasn't awkward, it was kinda cool. My brother has this friend who black and Chinese and apparently he's good with everyone.

I make the connection to Tiger Woods, the champion golfer with one Korean and one African American parent, and discover she didn't know he was part Asian.

Jessica: There was also this time when I wanted to be mixed. Someone would be like “I'm 25% Thai, 25% Japanese, Vietnamese, and like Filipino” and stuff, and I would be like (low, depressed voice) “I'm Chinese.” What would it be like if I was like Korean or something. Then I got over it. I'm part of the biggest race in the world.

SG: Can you tell the difference between Japanese and Chinese, for example?

Jessica: I think they may have bigger eyes and look like they're more calm. When you think of Japanese people, you think of like calm ponds. And like Asian people you think of like red fury.”

Recent experiences have made her more conscious of distinctions between nationality and race. In Washington she went to the Holocaust Museum and found out that more Jews are living in the U.S. than in Russia. The school's second largest immigrant group is Russian Jews. She says that she purchased *The Diary of Anne Frank* and was in the middle of it but that the character annoyed her, “In the beginning of the book she's like ‘I want everyone to like me.’ That's what made me think about it, I was like that could totally be me talking.” She goes on to say that she doesn't feel close to either her father or her mother, although she's closer to her mother. I ask if her mother annoys her, expecting that she would identify with Anne's difficult relationship with her mother. She says she gets angry with her mother easily. She thinks that is a phase she is passing out of. I ask if she's more comfortable with her mother being Chinese, and she says, “I never had anything against her being Chinese, but yeah, sure.” This seems to

contradict an earlier remark about being embarrassed when her mother spoke Chinese, but perhaps what embarrassed her was the implication that Jessica also spoke Chinese, rather than the fact that she had a Chinese-speaking mother.

Finally I ask her if her teachers paid enough attention to her culture in school. She says that in sixth grade she had a Chinese American teacher, but she only remembers studying China, rather than any particular aspect of culture that her teacher brought to the classroom. I ask about books and she says that *Child of the Owl* was the only book she remembers reading that deals with Chinese American culture. The urban California setting is also particularly relevant to her.

SG: Would a book in the same setting but with characters from a different culture be as relevant?

Jessica: Better if it's to our culture because you say like "Oh, I went through that too and then you can kinda see the decisions they make and kind of affect yours too.

SG: Would a European American character have as much of an impact on you?

Jessica: Well, you see so much of it like on T.V. and stuff, you know.

She changes the subject, "Did you know Alaska is almost touching Russia?"

When I ask her for suggestions for next year she says that we should do book groups again. She doesn't think the whole class (meaning students who aren't Chinese American) would relate to it even though it's humorous. I ask if she thinks European American students should learn more about Asia.

Jessica (emphatically): Yeah! We learn about theirs. We learn about 'Europe' (spoken in a deep authoritative voice). We laugh together.

SG: Most of the teachers in the state are European American.

Jessica: I know.

SG: Do you think teachers should learn about the cultures of the students they teach?

Jessica: But seriously, people in China they're required to learn English... in school...I have this theory that we should just implant a chip into everyone's head. Maybe I'll make that chip.

SG: You should do that! Study genetic engineering.  
 Jessica: But I hate math.

After graduation Jessica sends me an email reflecting on her attempts to downplay her identification with her heritage culture throughout middle school:

In 6th grade, people asked my opinion, and would turn to me when they were confused. In 7th grade, people didn't assume I was stupid, but they didn't assume I was smart. That was when I was first accepted into the "Semi cool, semi wealthy asian (sic) girls group." It didn't take long for me to realize how whitewashed they were, and I tried to be the same. Confessions: I had never tried clam chowder, I ate rice almost every night, and I understood more than "a little" Chinese. Only recently have I actually understood why they say "As you get older, you start not to care what others think." I think from mid 7th grade to mid 8th grade was when I cared most what others thought. I went shopping every couple weeks, buying name brand clothes, things I didn't need, and things I only intended on wearing once, to impress friends and people I didn't like. I came across a quote this summer that I liked.. "Too many people spend money they haven't earned, to buy things they don't want, to impress people they don't like." I also spent a lot of time matching outfits and making sure everyone saw my new Jordans and Abercrombie jacket. Of course I did it in a modest way, walking by shoeheads and Abercrombie zombies, so they could scream out how much they loved my clothes. I felt awkward in places like Abercrombie when I was with a group of Asian kids. To be honest, I didn't want to look like a "fob" trying to wear a "white people" brand. Throughout 8th grade with all this talk about being Asian and who I am, I think I slowly started changing. I became more aware of racism, and may have gotten more wrapped into it while I tried to avoid it.... I think the first thing I did was try to separate myself from "fobs." There was this girl with chunky highlights that spoke really bad English (sic), and for some reason, I really didn't like her for it. Okay so that might be the reason. Flashback from middle school: I let people look down at me and make me feel like crap, but one day, I actually started believing that it really annoys the hell outta people if they can't intimidate you.

*Susan's Interview: "Chinese Is Good and Your Culture Is Important and Stuff, but It's Not Like Everything."*

Susan is relatively quiet during the group discussions, but becomes expansive in the one-on-one interview. We begin by talking about *Nothing but the Truth (and a Few White Lies)*:

Susan: I kinda liked the book that we were reading because then it...like the mother, it kinda related to how my mom is sometimes, just that my mom is different because she came here at like thirty something year old and I don't think her [Patty's] mom did, so her mom's a little bit more Americanized than my mom. And since my grandparents are here, they kind of influence my mom to be more Chinese and not become like super Americanized. I think the girl [Patty] kinda felt like the way I did sometimes."

I pick up on her use of the past tense and ask if she feels differently now. "Well, I kinda appreciate my mom a little bit more now after reading the book. Sometimes she just gets on my nerves." She also has experienced the tonic. She says her mother makes her drink it but then amends that to say her grandmother makes her drink it. She comments that usually it smells good and she likes drinking it. I ask if she felt the scene with the tonic was exaggerated. She remembers one time when she was made to drink something that smelled bad and burned her throat so she ran away the next time it was offered. She says, "I don't think they were exaggerating that much because then, um, when she was talking about it I could imagine what happened. Like they have this big pot in the middle of the kitchen and she'll be spooning it out and putting it in a bowl and make me drink it." I show her the packet of medicine my student's grandmother brewed for me when I was sick the week before and Susan agrees that it makes her feel better in a day or so. Her grandmother, however, "puts some ingredients inside a pot," instead of using a preparation.

Susan: There's this shop in Chinatown I go there all the time; they sell candy there too. It's good candy.

SG: Should I be using more books that relate to Chinese American culture in my classes?

Susan: Like in sixth grade I don't think I really wanted to be learning all this Chinese thing and having everybody talk about Chinese. I just wanted to like Americanize-ish. I think now what we're learning is enough. Cause in the sixth grade you don't know everybody yet; you're still...someone might judge you, say 'Oh she's a FOB when you know that you're not,

and then they would think, like if you're too proud of your culture it's just kind of weird. But now in eighth grade nobody really cares because we're just gonna leave anyway. And everybody knows what you are from the past two years. So in Olympic Park (a week long outdoor education experience for seventh and eighth graders) everybody was speaking Chinese and everybody was trying to teach [a friend] Chinese words and we were teaching her Koreanese."

She explains that one of her Chinese American friends had learned Japanese and Korean from watching T.V. so I bring up the discussion we had during the book group meeting about Chinese T.V. She says that she doesn't watch those shows.

Susan: I watched them when I was young but now I don't even understand what they're talking like they talk too fast, but sometimes there's like little tiny, tiny, tiny English subtitles on the bottom so I just read that. But then before there's this show that was really, really funny...it was about princesses and then I don't know what it's called in Chinese I wanted to watch...Oh and there's the monkey king. The monkey king was funny. But then now I still watch it like sometimes with my parents but really...like I only watch it when I'm bored, and now it's like kinda boring and stuff. But then at Olympic Park we were telling things we don't want the other rooms to hear about so we'd just say it in Chinese.

SG: How was that for [her non-Chinese friend]?

Susan (laughs): She understood a little bit...she learned how to say chopsticks. But I think she forgot by now.

SG: So you think you'll go back to experiencing the same feelings about your culture you had in sixth grade when you start high school?

Susan: Yeah, most likely. Probably when I get to be a junior or a senior I'll probably start talking Chinese more and stuff. But then if you say it too much people will know you're really fobby or something.

SG: So what's wrong with being "fobby"?

Susan: Like in the beginning it would be the clothes you wear first. Like you wear clothes from China. It's like you don't really fit in that much cause everybody's in trends, like everybody's Abercrombie, Hollister, American Eagle, and then like some people are Juicy now and then it's like...

SG: It's all about fashion, huh?

Susan: Yeah, it's mostly about fashion. It's like if you don't like talk in English that much people will think that "Oh you don't know how to say it. You say it in a weird accent."

SG: Do you mean other Chinese Americans will think that?

Susan: People think that being Chinese is all that and stuff, I just don't like it. I think Chinese is good and your culture is important and stuff but it's not like everything. Like before my uncle, he'd say like, "You're always

speaking English. You should learn Chinese more.” And I’m like, me and my sister would say, “Well, we’re not in China right now so we should be learning English more than Chinese.”

SG: Should everybody understand more about being Chinese given that there are so many Chinese in California?

Susan: Some people don’t like Chinese at all. They think they’re either really smart or...they’re really...stupid.

I ask if that’s stereotyping and she agrees. Then she tells me about a comedian she saw on television who has done comedy shows all over the world and concluded that Chinese people are the smartest in the world because a shopkeeper corrected his English grammar. “It’s fine how they respect the Chinese people, but then it’s like ‘aw, they don’t understand it at all. Tell them lies or something.” I comment that European Americans’ perception of Chinese people seems to be very extreme in both directions. On one hand, Chinese are the ones with all the answers, on the other, they can be easily tricked.” Susan agrees and goes on to talk about another television stereotype:

In that like teen show, it’s called *Ned’s Declassified* [Ned's Declassified School Survival Guide on Nickelodeon] . It’s like each episode tells you like how they do in middle school and stuff. And then there’s this girl and she’s supposed to be really, really smart, she’s Asian. That’s like the only Asian there. The only Chinese person there. It shows for the first day of school how should you deal with it and stuff, and then they have this girl, she’s supposed to be super smart, and they call her a nerd and stuff, and they have this like nerd group to help Ned get organized and then she’s the only Chinese there. You don’t see anybody else that’s Chinese. When I say Chinese I mean like Japanese, Vietnamese, or Korean..

SG: You mean Asian?

Susan: Asian, but not like Filipino Asian. Like the really light skin and Chinky eyes or something.

SG: “Chinky eyes?”

She says she has seen it on MySpace, an on-line social networking site, and demonstrates what it looks like by pulling her eyes back towards her temples. I ask how it feels to hear that phrase. She says she doesn’t mind because no one has referred to her

that way, but she wouldn't mind having "Chinky eyes because there are other people who have small eyes."

We move into the subject of school. I ask if she thinks her teachers know enough about Asian culture.

Susan: I don't think they ever mentioned anything about the Asian culture. In eighth grade like they don't do anything about being Asian or something.

SG: Did I?

Susan: You kinda did because you were talking about Chinese or something, but I think you kind of understand like being Chinese and stuff.

SG: Did I do enough? Should I do more?

Susan: I think you did a little too much because I didn't really hear anything about other than Asian except like *To Kill a Mockingbird* but like most of the books, like *Wooden Fish Songs*. I think you should focus on other groups like Mexicans or Latinos. I kind of like the book *Esperanza Rising*. There's two books by the same author. It's like *Riding Freedom*, I love that book, it's like the best book ever. There's this other book about Latinos. It's like something to do with Naomi.

SG: *Becoming Naomi Leon*.

Susan: Yeah, I loved that book. It's like the best. *Riding Freedom* is just about her becoming a boy. Cause she's getting prejudiced by being a girl (I think she's using prejudiced as a verb here, as in people are prejudging her). Oh, you should read that when you're doing that how boys see things. The gender thing [the gender role switching activity mentioned in Jessica's interview].

SG: Should I focus on the theme "Dealing with Differences" in my English class again?

Susan: Since we're reading books, yeah, kind of because we saw like how other people see other people too. I liked the topic cause there's so much books to be reading about it."

I ask her if she'll tell me if her prediction about not wanting to speak Chinese next year comes true. She says she knows she won't. I ask what teachers can do to prevent kids from feeling that way. "Well, it's not teachers, it's the kids, cause they'll just look at you like, 'Will she ever speak English?'" I ask her if it's mainly Asians she anticipates associating with. Her closest friend in elementary school was Latina but when they got to



middle school she stopped being close to her after a few months. Was it because she found other Latinos to hang out with? “Uh huh, and African American people. The friend I hung out with she turned out ghetto. She be talking ghetto, she be dressing ghetto.” Interestingly, Susan’s changes register and dialect when she describes her friend’s new persona.

We talk about another Latina girl who spends her time with Asians, even creating a new designation, “Me-Asians, for Mexican Asians.” Susan thinks that is due to having similar hobbies and interests to her Asian friends. She tells me about one African American girl who enrolled late in her mainly Asian and Latino elementary school. Although Susan wasn’t close to her she wasn’t mean to her, like some of the other students were. At graduation the girl cried when her parents didn’t come and Susan gave her a rose to comfort her.

*Mei’s Interview: “I Don’t Want to Shelter Myself”*

I ask Mei to define race and she tells me she thought race and ethnicity had exactly the same meaning. When I ask her how she defines culture she says, “Culture is like painting, and tradition, and the kind of places people lived in, daily life, or how they express themselves.” When I ask her to explain more about ethnicity, she says, “You can’t compare like people who are from the east to the west, cause then like maybe they might get water differently, or they might plant something differently, or they might grow something differently even though they’re pretty much the same people.” When I ask, “East and west of what?” she answers, “Of a country.”

In response to my question about racism, Mei describes her recent experience during a trip to Washington, D.C.:

We were going past the Vietnam Memorial, and it kinda sucked. It wasn't exactly racism but something along the lines, I guess, because over all the words there was like all American names. There weren't any like Chinese people or Vietnamese people even though it was the Vietnam War. I thought maybe someone of a different culture would be fighting the war. They were like white, 'Baker, Brown, or other names.

SG: Do you think any of the names could belong to African Americans?

Mei: No because they would have been followed by something different, like first names.

We discuss the memorial's designer. Mei knows something about how the designer was chosen, but doesn't mention that the designer is Asian American. When I ask if she knows the background of the designer, she says, "I think she's Korean or something." I tell her I had read that some veterans were upset that an Asian American's design was chosen to represent the veterans of a war with an Asian country.

Mei: I think when we were there we saw some veterans. These three (laughs) buff guys they were like white, I think they were veterans. They were sobbing. And everybody who walked by just shook their hands and stuff. And everybody who shook their hand was like white, unless some Asian person was with them and they shook their hand too, and I don't think like anybody from my school shook their hand. We just walked by them. I don't think we meant it or anything, we just didn't know. Until like Miss Webster (the supervising teacher) told us.

SG: Did Mrs. Webster shake their hands?

Mei: No, we just stared at them. Maybe it's just like the 'Asian' surfacing up in us. We just stare at them; give them their moments.

Asian Americans comprised the majority of the students on the trip as well as both teachers who accompanied them. I ask if she expected to see the names of any of the Vietnamese who also died in the war. She says no because this was a memorial built on American land by Americans to commemorate American soldiers.

SG: What about the Vietnamese who fought alongside the American soldiers and died with them?

Mei: Then they should have been on the wall.

SG: Did you experience any other type of racism while you were there?

Mei: Oh, the statue. There was a statue of these three men. One was an African American, one was a white, and one was a Vietnamese. They're

looking at the wall. They said that they're supposed to be of different races and they're all together, but I saw the white guy in front, and normally the one in front is the leader? I just thought that was not exactly right. But then it gets you thinking maybe this person decided to be faster than everybody else, like giving encouragement to hurry up, but this guy's in front. All three guys staring at one thing but the white guy's in front.

SG: How did that make you feel.

Mei: Surprised. But I really didn't care. It could have been fine without those three men there. I don't think they needed it, but that's just me.

Mei's next comments describe the distance she perceives between herself and other Chinese Americans:

They took us to a Chinese buffet because the majority of our group was Asian. Miss Louie (a Chinese American teacher) requested it. That was really not needed. I don't like buffet style Chinese food. I hate it. It's greasy. I thought it was like...I don't want to say stereotypical but I think that's what it is cause it was like sweet and sour chicken, rice. Then they had all this little dim sum stuff, and then they had fried rice and chow mien, and all that. I think they had fortune cookies and stuff. Right when we got off the airplane we went to this buffet." Mei begins complaining about the naïveté of some of the parents' questions, asking whether they would need to bring sheets, soap, etc. when it was clear from the itinerary that they would be staying at hotels. They had *never* traveled outside of San Francisco or they had traveled as far as L. A. or Las Vegas. It was like I felt so much better than all of these people cause like they'd never been out of California, they'd never stayed at hotels, and then it was probably their first time out of the state and it's not my first time. I've been out of the country to so many places like in August we're going to Rome. My mom she works hard, and she gets all these business trips so we go to Hawaii and Mexico. My dad, I don't know what got into him but he went working himself to death over should we take this tour, this tour, or this tour? Then like last week I finished this book called *New Moon* and in it the character goes to Volterra and it's like Palazzo dei Priori or something and it's like I want to go see that but then it's like completely way off form anything else. So I'm just like O.K. I can't see that. And then like next year I want to go to Paris in France and my sister, she wants to go to Malaysia, that's where my dad grew up, and Singapore so we're probably going to go there too someday.

She explains that her dad was originally from Hong Kong. His family moved to Malaysia because of war, and he considers himself Malaysian. "He didn't have time to let all that Hong Kong culture sink in." I ask if she interacts with her grandparents. One of

her paternal grandparents lives in the area; her maternal grandparents live off the coast of Shanghai on an island famous for their seafood. She tells me that her mother is a great cook who has inherited her skill from her mother.

SG: That's why you're so critical of the Chinese buffet!

Mei: Actually, you know what? I really don't care what I eat on tour because, you know, first of all, you're in a different place. You might as well sample what they have; you're on tour. You *cannot* be picky. You just take what you get. Oh my God, These girls, they were like, "I wish there were chopsticks' at an *American* continental breakfast. I wish there were chopsticks!

SG: Which girls did that?

Mei: The daughters of the parents I was telling you about who had never been out of San Francisco.

SG: Do you think those families are very traditional?

Mei: I think they're cheap 'cause like my friend, she says she has incredibly low self-esteem, but like she talks about herself anyway she can, and whenever you direct attention at her she smiles a hugely, huge smile, that just tells you that she is enjoying your attention to her. And every single hotel we went to she took all the shampoo bottles, conditioner bottles, soap bottles, and she said they were for souvenirs. You don't take seven bottles that are completely full and say they're souvenirs. Like my sister, we were in AZ, Arizona, and like we took the soap bottles cause they make really good bubbles, and like it's not like we're so cheap that we can't afford soap. Those people, they don't *know*.

SG: But she's your friend?"

Mei: Not really. Sometimes. On her good side.

SG: Does she make you uncomfortable?

Mei: Sometimes. Yeah. She does, cause I don't really want to hang out with someone who is incredibly cheap. Well, um, let's see, I think yesterday or the day before yesterday or something, I was looking up quotes and there's this Japanese proverb that says, "When the character of a man is not clear to you, look to his friends." I don't want to turn into somebody like her. I really don't.

SG: Do you think there's a danger of that?

Mei: I would have more of an influence on her, but then I don't want to shelter myself. I don't want to like keep your eyes closed with everything. You have to go out and experience everything. It seems like you should get better and grow and don't just stay the same way.

Her friends are mainly Asian, but she has a hard time making friends with "Indian people." She admits that she only knows one. There are about three in her grade level out

of 400 students. She also has opportunities to meet peers through her family's active involvement in the Bahá'í Church. She says, "I'm way better off with Persian people." She attributes this to the fact that the church originated in Persia. She says that at her Sunday school, only two families are Bahá'í, the rest are "Persian or white," but later clarifies that she meant Asian, since they are all Bahá'í.

Mei is proud of the excitement her family's special ethnic dishes generate among other members, describing them in great detail. In addition, she describes Persian food she has tried.

When I ask if she has a relationship with any of the people from her church outside of Sunday school, she talks about going to a religious study group on Friday nights. She has also attended retreats "teaching people, mainly Christians, how to convert, like get them interested into it." She describes another retreat focused on handicrafts. I ask her if she makes things too. She responds immediately, "I make my sister mad. It's an art." But she also does cross-stitching.

Mei: I got addicted to it in China. So like it's I wake up, there's nothing to do in China. Only till the last day my cousin started talking to me, and then I wish I could stay longer.

SG: Why the last day?

Mei: I spent six weeks there and it wasn't till the last day that he started talking to me and my sister. I don't know. I think it's probably because he was just nervous. Maybe he was scared or maybe he had school. Maybe he's not used to me and my American way of life.

SG: Do you feel like an outsider when you go to China?

I feel more... loud (laughs). In America my friend and me, we used to walk down to Starbucks, a coffee shop, and like half the time we'd be like singing out loud and half the time no one paid attention to us. You do that in China you'd be stared at. But the guys who wear pants (referring to the current fashion) over here, does not happen, and like people who bleach their hair all the time. Anything that's American on a native Chinese just seems weird. You listen to the rap here and you listen to the rap there, it's just so weird. I don't like listening to it. I feel like cringing.

She says that Shanghai is a “really cool” place. There are many small cafes and “small stars” that entertain there. She thinks they have talent but they sing Britney Spears (a European American singer whose career peaked in the late 1990s) from like ages ago.” She says that very few people speak English and it’s very difficult to get movies in English. Most of the movies are dubbed in Chinese. The women in her family, her mother, aunt and herself, like Korean dramas, especially the one that is set in ancient times. “It’s addicting.” She says if her aunt didn’t have to go to work she’d watch T.V. all day. “

SG: You’re 100% bilingual?

Mei: Except for the reading. I can’t read.

SG: Do you want to learn since you go back and forth?

Mei: No. I’ll just ask my mom.

SG: I’ll check you out in a few years and see whether you’ve changed your mind.

Mei: I don’t think so...(she gives me her reasons by way of describing her sister’s school). I really don’t like that school. It’s I want to say 99.9% Asian but it’s probably 90. And like a few white people, a maybe couple of black, almost no Indian people (referring to South Asians), It’s just so scary. Aren’t you supposed to be like if you live in America it’s people of all different kinds of races? But like her school is completely Asian. You can’t get used to everybody if you’re just getting used to Asian people.

I mention that Susan spoke about her embarrassment speaking Chinese in middle school and Mei concurs. She equivocates, first strongly agreeing, then saying, “I don’t know.” She explains, “Sometimes I like to speak English more than Chinese, but other times my mouth gets tired of English words and I just want to switch to Chinese. I speak Chinese at home, but then I feel like I speak English too much, and I just want to switch.” She doesn’t like speaking Cantonese in front of a Cantonese speaking person “unless it’s my dad.” When she was three she was fluent in Cantonese “like any native person” because she spent time with her father’s mother. However, when she went to visit her

mother's island where they speak a Shanghai particular dialect, her mother would have to translate everything she said.

Visiting her paternal grandfather's family who lived in the country was an eye-opening experience for her, "They didn't have modern stuff. No air conditioning. They were really far from anywhere." They made their living fishing and dried their own seaweed. "I've never seen anything like it."

She encapsulates their provinciality by telling me they ate frogs. When I ask if she did too, she makes a face. I tease, "I thought you were so open to new things." "Yeah, but there's a limit." She goes on to tell me that her mother even fed her *escargot* that she ate willingly, not knowing what it was.

We move on to the topic of culture in the curriculum. Mei's response is very consistent with her analysis of the Vietnam Memorial.

SG: Do you feel like your teachers were sensitive to you culture, race or ethnicity?

Mei: Yes.

SG: Do you feel that you learned enough about it in school?

Mei: No. All that we studied was Europe, and we switched all the way to American history.

SG: Weren't there Asians involved in American history. "No. Well, they didn't mention it. One section (in the eighth grade text book), that's it! Angel Island (the West Coast immigration station that received the majority of Asian immigrants) was like a paragraph. Then they switched to something else. They had a poem (immigrants carved poetry on the walls of their dormitories during the weeks and months they were detained awaiting admission to the U.S. mainland) and one sentence that went something like this, 'People like this came to American looking for a better life.' That's it!

SG: Could you teachers have done more?

Mei: It's like that's the book and you really can't do anything else unless you don't use the book. I think most teachers are too lazy to think of their own.

She amends the statement, describing how much time and money it would cost to plan lessons that are not provided by the school:

Sixth grade was cool. We did the most. We touched on almost everything (in your class). But then it's like every single book goes in depth, incredibly in depth for Europe, but then for China it's just like medium. It's just like one section on it and then they move on.

She comments on how the eighth grade American history textbook discusses both Christianity, and the Constitution, which stipulates the separation of church and state. "In a public school learning about Christianity, doesn't that contradict everything?" I tell her that students are allowed to learn about it as long as their teachers don't try to convert them. "But I mean there's so much about Christianity, but if they had a little bit more about Muhammad that would have been interesting too. They don't mention my religion at all." I begin to ask a question, "They talk about Christianity in American history..." and she interrupts, finishing my sentence, "I get really bored of it."

She mentions that she attended an independent religious school during her elementary years:

I must have heard the Bible fifty times over. I knew every prayer there is. Right now I have mixed feelings about forgetting the prayers. Sometimes I'm happy I forgot it, but other times I feel kind of bad because this is still important. It's not like one religion is better than another so I have mixed feelings.

She says she likes the prayers in her religion better because they are more poetic, and quotes one. The translations from Persian make the prayers seem more poetic, "like creating new art." Her father has done "service" in India and in other parts of the U.S. I assume she is talking about a type of missionary service. She intends to ask her father to sign her up to go on a pilgrimage to Haifa, Israel. He will have to put her on a waiting



list, and it will take years for her name to come up. She wants to see the picture of the religion's founder, which is kept there.

## CHAPTER 5 ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Introduction

The participants' animated responses to the discussion group and interviews clearly demonstrate the middle school age group's engagement with cultural, ethnic, and racial identity negotiation. In my journal I use words such as "irrepressible," "enthusiastic," and "charged with energy" to describe the exchange of ideas among them. At several points on the audiotapes I hear myself pleading with them to take turns so the tape isn't recording a jumble of unintelligible sounds. Chapter IV has many examples of this interest. Susan's narrative about her Latina friend suggests that she was thinking about racial and ethnic issues as early as elementary school. Justin and Winston's comments on in-group dating are a clear indication that they feel growing up Chinese American is a unique experience, best understood by other Asian Americans. The gregariousness they bring to the discussion group is in direct contrast to their prevailing silence in the classroom, where questions are met with downcast eyes.

While the participants in my study clearly recognize the importance of their ethnicity and culture in their lives, the best description for their mindset regarding identity is ambivalent. Both Kibria's (2002) research with adults and Asher's (2002) with high school students describe similar responses. Mei's reaction to my question about speaking Chinese is an example. When I ask if she, like Susan, was embarrassed at first about speaking Chinese in middle school, she immediately answers yes, then says "no," then "I don't know," and ends by explaining that sometimes speaking English, which she articulates fluently using standard American inflection and grammar, makes her mouth tired. On the other hand, she's also embarrassed to speak Cantonese, and doesn't know

Mandarin (which she refers to in Mandarin as Putonghua). At home she speaks Shanghainese, but only with her mother. Since language has a strong correlation with identity (Cummins, 2000), her situation illustrates the complexities of the second generation's identity negotiation.

Disequilibrium comes from triangulated pressure: participants speak of parental pressure not to become Americanized, peer pressure not to “act white” or be whitewashed,” as well as peer pressure not to act “fobby” an adjective based on the acronym F.O.B., fresh off the boat. Their experience with school, the main agency of exposure to hegemonic culture, and with mainstream media also factor into this pressure.

Being Americanized and acting white/being whitewashed have some elements in common, but because of the generation gap, the associated behaviors are distinct. Parental references to being Americanized are largely based on insufficient obedience, assertion of control over one's life, out-group relationships, and resistance to learning Chinese. Being whitewashed or acting white based on participant responses mainly refers to a predominance of relationships with European Americans, avoidance of ethnic group relationships, low participation in ethnic cultural events or rituals, and having more freedom of choice.

For example, when I ask Winston if students mainly interact along racial lines, he responds affirmatively, citing one exception, a girl he refers to as whitewashed. Jessica calls Koreans white because they don't associate with their own ethnicity. Marie's example of a whitewashed friend is someone who gets to have overnights at peers' houses. When I ask Mei the question some months later she answers that whitewashed is a state of mind. Jessica writes in an email the following year:

I noticed there's some stages of being whitewashed and then accepting yourself. Like first you think it's cool to be whitewashed. Then you start learning to be white. Then you disapprove of people that aren't white washed. Then you slowly realize it's cool to be yourself. Then you slowly convert to some in between state where you're aware of when you're being white washed but still have Asian pride. It's kind of frustrating to see your friends in the first few stages and waiting for them to come around and realize that being Asian is awesome.

Participants criticize the biracial character, Patty, in Headley's (2006) book, for being whitewashed because she makes a big deal about consuming the soup her mother makes for her, and colludes with a white friend who remarks on her Chinese mother's weirdness. However, participants' disapproval of being "whitewashed" or "acting white" is counterbalanced by their fear of being labeled as too Chinese, or fobby. To an outsider, they may seem adept at negotiating the multiple cultural roles they play as Asian Americans, but their comments often imply a degree of discomfort with all their roles. Jessica's email above implies that she was just transitioning out of the "first stages" at the end of middle school.

#### Parent Interactions

An area of tension participants most frequently mention is parent expectation. Since culture is first introduced in the context of the family the relationship between child and parent has a strong impact on identity. In both the group discussions and the interviews it seems no matter how far away they stray from the topic of family, their discussion cycles back to parents and their impossibly high standards. Headley, a Chinese American, also reflects these concerns in her book. Even though the main character is away from home and having new experiences, like Susan and Jessica, she frequently holds imaginary dialogues with her mother.

Qin, Way, and Mukherjee (2008) who did interviews with Chinese American students ages nine to fourteen over a five year period also identify enormous parental pressure as a recurring theme. Although 88% of the participants in their study were born outside the U.S., my second-generation participants, along with other Asian American students in my classes over the years, express the same feelings. In fact, when I asked the eighth graders at the beginning of 2007 to write about the most important issues a thirteen year old must deal with, all my Chinese American students included parental pressure at the top of their lists. Validating the finding of researchers who have studied this population (Kibria, 2002; Lew, 2006; A Louie, 2004; Tuan, 1998, Min & Kim, 2002), the participants in my study say that Asian parents are different from European American parents in terms of demanding superior academic achievement. Susan and Jessica talk about this in their presentation when they say that their parents expect no less than 100%, even when their scores are high above other students.

Language is another one of the pressure points. Children are sent to Saturday school, which is mainly taught in Mandarin. Since all of the participants speak Cantonese or another dialect at home, they are at a disadvantage. Chinese schools emphasize literacy, rather than oral language development, so those participants who attend are taught how to write in a language they don't speak. This creates frustration and resignation. In addition, many of the newly arrived immigrants speak Mandarin, so their children are more advanced. Jessica, for example, was placed in a class with seven year olds because of her language level. She later dropped out. Marie expresses the same frustration with the instruction that drove Jessica to quit, "They don't translate [into

English] so it's just like nothing to grab onto." It's notable that Marie would prefer a translation in English to Cantonese, her home language.

In her interview Marie describes the discontinuity in her parents' insistence on her learning Chinese as a teenager, but not wanting Chinese to interfere with English mastery when she was younger. She expresses dissatisfaction because her parents seem to equivocate, contrasting her father's telling her "you're not white because you're always Chinese" and at the same time, "Even though you have to remember you're Chinese, you have to learn English real well, because this is your country." Based on Marie's description of her parents as speaking little English, it is likely that that need to have a fluent English speaker in the family took precedence over heritage language maintenance when she was younger. Now that she is entering her teenage years, they view bilingualism as an investment in her future. Later in the interview Marie continues, "My parents have this whole thing about one day you might want to move back to China and then you should know it [Mandarin]." Her parents' investment in bilingualism appears to be both culturally and economically motivated.

The example above also reflects the ambivalence that first generation immigrants transfer to their children: cultural preservation coupled with acculturation. While her parents are still bent on pursuing the 'American Dream,' in Marie's family's case, a house of their own in Texas, where the climate is more suitable than Northern California and the cost of living more affordable than the Bay Area, they envision a transnational future for their offspring. The dynamic between these two ethnicities, according to the literature (Kibria, 2002; Lew, 2006; A. Louie, 2004; Tuan, 1998, Min & Kim, 2002),

continues into adulthood for Chinese Americans, as opposed to European Americans who are generally more focused on assimilation (Waters, 1990).

The participants' conflation of white and English-speaking is important to note. Marie was one of the students in my sixth grade class suggesting that one important condition of being white was speaking English. Only European Americans in that group mentioned skin color as a condition for being white.

Parents also hold non-ethnic Chinese speakers up to their children as a way to goad them into studying the language. For example, Mei's father comments that Charlie Chan, the T.V. character played by a European speaks better Chinese than she does.

While many of the participants complain about parental pressure, very few of them openly rebel, at least at this age. Marie speaks of the sacrifices her parents make to give her a better life, and her obligation to meet their expectations as a way of paying them back. At the same time, Marie enjoys the independence her parents' lack of English affords, "[T]hey don't get that involved in my school so it's kinda nice." Her friend's second-generation mother is in school everyday as a volunteer, and often works with her daughter on school projects. While Marie recognizes that her friend has more freedom in some respects, having her mother so involved with school also cuts into her autonomy. This is something Marie is not subjected to.

Jessica demonstrates the most ambivalence towards her mother out of all the participants. She will criticize her, and then criticize herself for her own attitude. On one hand she talks about how her mother no longer embarrasses her because her friends seem to accept her, and on the other hand, she describes her mother as annoying. Out of the group, she expresses the most empathy with Patty who was trying to distance herself

from her mother and her expectations. At the same time, she dislikes Patty for treating her mother so poorly, especially when she shows disloyalty around her white friend.

This ambivalence also applies to appearance. During one book discussion group, the participants are talking about the “China dolls,” two girls in Patty’s family circle of friends who are held up as an example of perfection, both because of their behavior as well as their looks. The girls in the group compare their own look to the “China dolls,” and discuss hair dyeing. Susan says she can’t get her hair to change color, and Jessica comments, “That’s really cool, though because your parents know you’re Asian.” This seeming non sequitur makes sense if it is interpreted in the context of the second-generation’s conflicts with biculturalism. These teenagers may do things that don’t measure up to their parents’ criteria for good Chinese children, but at least they *look* Asian. Ironically, one of the trends participants note in visits to China and a marker to identify recent immigrants is bleached-blond hair. This is an example of the heritage culture shifting direction while the immigrant culture stays frozen (Choe, 1999).

Jessica’s reading of *Wooden Fish Songs* also shows similar vacillation. The book’s hero, Lue Gim Gong, gets the last laugh, outsmarting the whites that trick him out of the rights to sell his frost resistant orange. Jessica says she did not enjoy the book in general, but the one thing she finds laudable is the unhappy ending: Sum Jui, the hero’s mother, remains a poor peasant. Although Jessica, like many of the other participants, reacts negatively to the stories her parents tell about deprivations and hardships they experienced in China, she reveals more interest in the character of the Chinese villager than the Chinese American hero. Her response to my question about background knowledge of Sum Jui’s historical period, “Yeah it sounds like my mom’s: Poverty,



poverty,” demonstrates the connection she makes between the narrative and her mother’s childhood, even though the time periods are about 100 years apart. Susan also makes a similar connection with the book, saying it helped her understand her mother better.

Parents’ stories about childhood experiences generate some of the most spirited responses from the participants. They feel resentful that their parents have surrounded them with prosperity all their lives and then expect them to assign it the same value as someone who has grown up struggling to survive. This situation could also apply to parents who experienced a decline in status due to immigration. The participants’ responses indicate this could be one of the biggest gaps in understanding between immigrant parents and their offspring. Although the stories generate antipathy, a reaction opposite to what their parents intend, Jessica’s and Susan’s responses to *Wooden Fish Songs* indicate they are also remembered and internalized.

In addition to feeling pressure to excel academically, participants whose parents speak little or no English also deal with “parentification” (OwYang, Way, & Mukerjee, 2008), or a kind of role reversal in which children take on adult responsibilities because of their fluency in the host language. An example is Jessica’s story about her mother’s calling her third grade classroom asking her for help writing checks. This is a prevalent second-generation issue (Lew, 2006). Jessica’s statement about her parents having no time to learn English because they spend too much time working also reflects Lew’s findings.

Some of the participants take on this responsibility more willingly than others. Marie’s comments about her obligation to her parents contrasts with Jessica’s fluctuating relationship with her mother. Marie appears to have more clarity about her cultural

identity than Jessica. This correlates with her attitude towards her parents, but it is hard to say which is the cause and which the result. Like the high school students in Lew's (2006) study who look to co-ethnic peers as a standard for evaluating their own families, Jessica gives her friends' acceptance of her mother's behavior as a reason to be more tolerant herself. She credits her change in attitude regarding speaking Chinese to Marie's positive influence.

Parental pressure may not always have the desired effect of driving children to success. When Justin first poses the question, "Why didn't they use protection?" in reference to Patty's mother's pregnancies, I thought he was being precocious. However, at the end of the session, as the participants were leaving the room I saw his query in a different light. I wrote in my journal:

One salient remark was made just before the bell rang (of course) and the students left for a weeklong spring break. I told Justin that I thought his remark about protection was interesting and wondered why he had picked up on that topic. He said that he wondered if he had been an accident. Earlier I had gotten a call from his older brother at U.C. Davis asking me how he was doing in my class. I praised his poetry and interest in the class. I wonder if any of that got back to him, and I'm thinking probably not. He gels his hair in a spiky style, wears saggy pants gangsta style, and likes girls more than school. I bet he gets a lot of flak at home (like Joy Lei's "American Hmong" students)... He also picked up on the underworld in Chinatown and had written "guns" as one of the themes in the book [*Child of the Owl*].

Pressure to conform and be a good student seems to compel Justin to acquiesce just enough to get by (he maintains a B average), Yet, at some level, he rejects the values his parents are pushing on him. At the same time, he gives lip service to those values when he says, "All you need is your roots and family." Which response encapsulates the real Justin? I would guess both.

Another point of contention is the feeling of being overprotected by their parents compared to European American peers. Justin contrasts his parents with Winston's because he can stay over night at friend's houses whereas Winston is never allowed to. However, as I question him further, he divulges that his parents make contact with the friends' families before he is given permission. When talking about *Nothing but the Truth (and a Few White Lies)*, he mentions independence as one of the aspects of the character's life he is most interested in. Marie also contrasts her own situation with a third-generation friend who is always spending the night at friends' homes. Previously, I had a conversation with this girl's mother who commented on her daughter's disappointment when many of her friends weren't allowed to stay over at her house. Her mother specifically attributed this to immigrant parents' attitudes towards childrearing.

Much of the ambivalence that permeates the participants' narratives seems to stem from a dynamic tension between pressures from parents and pressures from peers. This comes up in every interview as well as many of the group discussions. Consistent with Erickson's (1968) findings, at this age they are on the brink of moving from a parent centered to a peer-centered universe

Of all the participants, Jessica kept closest contact with me after the project, and we emailed back and forth the summer after our discussion group. I had asked the participants to write a description of themselves that I could include in the research. Jessica calls it her autobiography, after the paper that Patty's English teacher assigned as a final project. Her language suggests her family is decreasing in importance and her peer relationships are increasing. Although as an eighth grader Jessica frequently makes

references to her mother, in particular, in anticipation of high school, she only mentions peers.

### Peer Interactions

Part of “who am I?” at this age is the dilemma of “where do I fit in?” versus “where should I fit in?” In other words, should I change myself or should I accept myself as I am? (Erikson, 1968). Peer pressure is complex for middle school age Asian Americans who must walk a tightrope stretched between appearing too white and too Asian. Often they don’t notice the contradictions this engenders, part of their cultural ambivalence. They talk about wanting blond highlights in their hair, or experimenting with hair dyes at one point, and criticizing Chinese nationals or recent immigrants for bleaching their hair at another. The fact that they barely seem to notice these contradictions seems to validate the idea that identity at this age is very fluid. During group discussions I hear them test different ideas on each other to see which seem most appropriate.

In *Nothing but the Truth (and a few White Lies)* (2006), Headly has not really dealt with the corporatization of youth culture but this is clearly an issue on adolescents’ minds, part of the criteria by which they define appropriate and inappropriate socialization. By corporatization I mean unquestioning acceptance of consumer culture and preoccupation with brand names fostered by aggressive corporate marketing. That doesn’t necessarily mean that they think one has to possess all the right brands to be acceptable or accepted. It means, rather, that an individual has to have the appropriate attitude regarding the possessions. For example, don’t try to pretend that you have designer clothing when you actually have knockoffs, or put too much emphasis on

presenting yourself as trendy. These are issues that were around when I was growing up; “phony” was a stock adolescent vocabulary word in the 1950s and 60s describing someone exhibiting similarly inappropriate behavior. The difference is that now the shopping arena is global. Many of the designer products are manufactured in China, and adolescents who travel back and forth look for bargains that will enhance their fashion status back in the U.S. This is also an opportunity for them to interact with the heritage culture, since they need to negotiate the prices and the authenticity of the items they invest in.

*Peer Influence on Cultural identity:*

All of the four girls interviewed, and the fifth that participated in the book group are second generation (ABCs). However, they all fear being perceived as FOBs (first or 1.5 generation recently arrived immigrants). Markers include language, accent, clothing style, and hairstyle. “We are the people our parents warned us about” was the rebellious slogan of the late 60s and early 70s youth, my generation. Applied to this group it becomes a complex brocade of competing cultural expectations: “We are the people we don’t want to be known as except by our parents.” Ironically, most of the girls they perceive as third-generation, whose standards they strive to meet are, with few exceptions, also second-generation. Those who are third generation experience similar struggles over which culture should dominate. One third-generation girl I interviewed as a seventh grader writes, “I don’t think I’m accepted by my culture because I’m too loud,” and expresses an interest in studying Chinese. When I ask Marie to clarify the disparate aspects of her identity, American and Chinese, her use of “kinda” and “I guess” show how tentative her analysis is at this point, and how she is still struggling to make sense of

this dual identity. With the rise of China as a first world power in competition with the U.S., these struggles may become more significant.

The boys are comparatively relaxed about status negotiation, but they also waver between wanting to be grouped with ABCs and retaining their heritage identity. Justin's profession of loyalty to his family and culture is later contradicted by his aspiration to "be bold" and "break the stereotype." However, his striking out involves adopting African American fashion and music, rather than inventing something himself. Lei (2001) finds this same style adopted by the Southeast Asian boys she studied. Since this look is associated with toughness and coolness, she interprets their style as a defense against bullying. Justin is a tall, athletic boy in a Chinese American dominated school. I believe he is more concerned with avoiding the constraints of the stereotype rather than a physical threat.

### *Labels*

The ways in which participants use the terms race, ethnicity, culture and nationality are ambiguous. Mei refers to the "Chinese race," saying that she sees ethnicity and race as synonymous. However, she puts herself in the Asian category in which she includes South Asians. When she talks about her father's identifying more with Malaysia, where he grew up, than with Hong Kong where he was born, because "He didn't have time to let all that Hong Kong culture sink in," she seems to be defining identity as national, not racial. Winston refers to himself as full Chinese, meaning he is one race. When I ask him about the "American" part he responds, "I just live here, and go to school here, and have American friends." Yet when asked to specify what type of American friends he includes those of both Asian and European ancestry. If those Asians are

American why isn't he? Winston has been here for half of his 14 years, yet he considers himself Chinese. Would he respond differently if Chinese American history were more evident in the curriculum? When I ask if the participants see themselves as Chinese rather than Chinese American, they tell me that they are Chinese American, but it's too cumbersome to say so they shorten it. However, they are all clear that Chinese from China are different. And, as mentioned above, they make distinctions between Chinese Americans (ABC vs. FOB).

Asian identity is also fluid. They use the term for self-description and affiliation but they also speak of clear heritage national, as well as regional distinctions. Espiritu (1992) predicts that national designations will disappear eventually, but that is not yet the case among these second-generation youth. Their transnational mobility may be the reason. Marie is the only one of the group who has not yet been to China to visit relatives.

#### *In Group Versus Out Group Friendships*

Winston talks about his discomfort with African Americans at the school because they are too "hard core ghetto," then admits that his best friend is equally, or in one case, more "ghetto" (according to his own definition: a style of dressing, speaking, and acting associated with lower class African Americans). This illustrates the embeddedness of culture, ethnicity, and race (2006) in his consciousness. When pushed to analyze his perceptions of how "ghetto" someone is, he is left with, "but I understand what [Justin] means because I'm Asian, too." This racial solidarity comes up again when Justin and Winston talk about their preference for dating Asian Americans.

On the other hand, Marie demonstrates how affiliation supersedes labels during the group's analysis of FOB characteristics. When I point out to them that Justin and Winston could fit the definition, she cuts to the chase, "If we like them we're not gonna label them, and if we don't like them we're gonna label them." This attitude also applies across racial and ethnic lines when Winston describes his friendship with a European American "skater" whom he has known since elementary school, and Jessica describes her Latina friend who bonds with Chinese Americans.

The participants' flexibility with labeling even extends to me. On the last day of school, when eighth graders are supposed to be off site, Jessica, Marie, Winston, and Justin return for a visit. They ask me, "Do you want to be Chinese American, Ms. Gold?" The question gives me pause, and then I answer, "I think what I want is for everyone to feel comfortable in his or her own skin." Marie responds, "If you do want to be Chinese, we'd accept you."

For teachers it signifies that helping students become open to exploring interracial, interethnic and intercultural interaction involves giving them many opportunities to do so. Talking about how "we all have to get along" is not enough. In their interviews, both Winston and Justin separately recommend teacher intervention when forming work groups in the classroom to facilitate this process. To hear this coming from them is ironic because given any loophole in my grouping strategy over the year, they would manage to end up together. Yet both tell me they wish I had pushed them out of their relational comfort zone.

Working with these participants helps me understand my own frames of reference better. When I hear Jessica using the term "mixed," I assume she is referring to an



interracial combination. However, my perspective is broadened when she clarifies:

“Someone would be like ‘I’m 25% Thai, 25% Japanese, Vietnamese, and like Filipino,’ and stuff, and I would be like (low, depressed voice) I’m Chinese. What would it be like if I was like Korean or something? Then I got over it. I’m part of the biggest race in the world.”

It is critical for me in my role as a teacher to be able to see things from where others stand. I remember reading *Bud, not Buddy*, a *bildungsroman* by Christopher Paul Curtis (1999) about an African American boy. Told from the perspective of a young African American, black characters are unmarked in relation to color, while white is used in the description of all European American characters. This literary device threw me at first until I realized that most media use white or European American as the default and other races are marked. Jessica’s statement also shows the tendency to blur race and nationality or ethnicity.

“Participants conflate “white” with “Americanized,” but American culture is very much in flux itself. As Marie points out, youth embrace African American styles, language, and music. Ironically, parents, probably unknowingly, refer to black youth culture when they accuse their children of being Americanized, especially when it comes to style of speech and dress. While I see white as a racial category, my Chinese American students view it more as a cultural category. This would explain their describing themselves as “part” or “half” white. African Americans tend to view white as predominately racial, although definitely associated with cultural attributes. In contrast, African Americans may talk about acting white, or being an Oreo cookie [Black outside, white inside], but they don’t refer to one another or themselves as white.

Jessica's statement, "Being at Oceanside they learn to love Asians," captures the way a subaltern culture (Gramsci, 1971) can become the dominant culture in a microcosm. At Oceanview Middle School, members of the dominant culture experience subalternity even though this is reversed in the larger society. When I asked my class if any of them had heard other students make assumptions about their culture, more European Americans raised their hands than Asian Americans. Being at a school with a large population of co-ethnics has a very different impact on identity than being one of a few (K. Lee, 2007, Lew, 2006). The adjustment for them may come later when youth leave home for college (See Yeh & Hwang, 2000).

When Jessica refers to China as the place other Americans get all their manufactured goods, she is also referencing this reversal. During my childhood in the 1960s, "Made in Japan" or "Made in Hong Kong," was synonymous with low quality. Now the status of Chinese merchandise is elevated and completely accepted by Jessica's generation.

Hall (1996) says identity is predominantly adopted in relation to what one is not, rather than what one is or on the basis of commonalities shared with others. The participants demonstrate this tendency when they talk about Asians versus East Asian, East Asians versus Chinese, and even regional differences among Chinese. Winston refers to Taiwan as "kinda different"; Justin distinguishes between China and Hong Kong. However, as Americans of Chinese descent they experience dissimilarities with their peers in the various regions of China (Tuan, 1998). This comes up when Mei talks about the uncomfortable silence between herself and her Chinese cousin, and the feeling of being a loud American when she visits to China.

### Racism, Stereotyping, and Discrimination

In contrast to the data collected by most of the researchers I reviewed (Kibria, 2002; Kim, 2001; Lee, 1996; Phelan et al, 1998; Tuan, 1998; Wu, 2002), when I ask my participants to describe their experience with racism, at first they do not talk about racist acts against themselves. They comment on the bigoted attitude of family members, mainly towards whites and blacks. Anti-Chinese racism comes up later in our dialogues. Their experience as the dominant population in the school, upbringing inside an ethnic community, the invisibility of Chinese Americans in the historical record, the desire of their parents to protect them, and reluctance to share those stories with me, a white adult, are all possible explanations for this reaction. Eventually, however, stories about racist behavior emerge. Sharon talks about racist bullying that she tries to ignore. Winston and Justin come in after school one day to report an incident on the tennis court when two younger white boys called them names and told them to go back to China. They recognize the assumptions and remarks non-Asian students make about their academic aptitude also constitute a form of racial bullying (Ancheta, 1998, Lee, 1996, Osajima, 1993).

Besides the racism they experience personally, they also have a robust awareness of media racism, in the forms of both stereotyping and exclusion. Even Marie, who at first dismisses the idea that Chinese and Chinese American culture and history should be incorporated in any significant way in the school curriculum, reacts with some anger when she describes seeing a group of Chinese singers recently, the first she has ever seen on television. Susan comments that the only Asian American on a popular show on Nickelodeon channel is a “nerd”, a socially awkward person who is preoccupied with

school to the exclusion of everything else. In her interview, Mei clearly reads the prejudice characterized by the statue she saw in front of the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D.C., where the “white guy” was placed in front of the Asian and African American. She says, “I don’t care,” but both her tone of voice and her repetition of the event belie that statement. Both she and Jessica see racism in the reactions of Washingtonians to their group of mostly Asian Americans. I recorded the following in my journal after Jessica’s first day back in my class:

Jessica came running in to tell me that she had her first experience of feeling like an outsider. “People stared at us. There were 46 Asians and two whites. They couldn’t figure out where we were from. Even the Asians stared at us. One woman came over and asked my friend, “Where do you come from?” Jessica imitates the woman’s tone with long pauses between each word and overly enunciated syllables. “They thought we were foreigners.” It’s ironic because I first experienced awareness of my American identity when I went overseas to France. Hers occurs when she leaves San Francisco for another region of her native land!

Jessica shows a well-developed sense of perspective when discussing the attitudes towards the two white students in her cousin’s Hong Kong school. Perhaps her visits to China have helped nurture this understanding of the way cultural behavior is situated in environment and circumstance.

With the exception of the two girls’ descriptions of their Washington, D.C. experiences the participants manifest the strongest reactions to racism and stereotyping of Chinese Americans in the context of reading *Nothing but the Truth (and a Few White Lies)*. They clearly interpret and are upset by the racism displayed by the white characters in particular, but also by Patty. While they find it appropriate to criticize their own culture when they find certain aspects of behavior or attitudes offensive, they are sensitized to prejudice and stereotyping.

Stereotype threat (Steele & Aronson, 1995) also plays a role in my participants' classroom conduct. When the participants tell me that they feel they will become even quieter in high school, they corroborate what many teachers have noticed about Asian American students (Tateishi, 2007). However, the reasons they give relate to the model minority stereotype, more than cultural constrictions. When they anticipate joining a larger pool of students representing more ethnic diversity, they don't want other students to perceive them as "smart" or a "know it all." Other eighth grade students have told me they are caught in a bind. They want their teachers to think they are smart, but that makes them vulnerable to judgmental peers. So they do what Marie describes, "...just be quiet and do their work." However, as Tateishi points out, this approach excludes them from many fields like journalism or law, which require verbal confidence. Addressing the under representation of Asians in those fields, she writes, "It matters [to the community] if we have lawyers, writers, activists, educators, business leaders, elected officials, and ordinary citizens who understand the power of language and use it."

However, the participants are not immune to the process of stereotyping other Chinese including Chinese American, other American ethnicities, or the opposite gender. For example, when Justin asks out of the blue whether Patty wears glasses. I write in my journal: "Why would he have this question? Is it because she's "brainy" and unnoticed by the athlete she likes? Is he reacting to a media stereotype that associates female intelligence with myopia and unattractiveness?"

Appearance is a strong preoccupation with this age group, and because of their transnational experience, orienting to a standard of beauty can be very complex. They are aware that white skin is considered high status in China and in overseas ethnic

communities because it is associated with an upper class exempt from outdoor agricultural labor. It is also associated with the dominant race in Europe and the U.S., colonial powers for the last century (Espiritu, 1992, Lowe, 1996). In the U.S being tan denotes higher status because it signifies the luxury of leisure time. However, that status is only bestowed on those with Northern European phenotypes and coloring, therefore excluding Chinese Americans.

Eye shape and hair color are also areas of contestation. Operations to create double eyelids are ever more popular among Asian Americans, as well as Asians according to Sandy Kobrin (2004) in her article “Asian Americans Criticize Eyelid Surgery Craze” (<http://www.womensenews.org/article.cfm/dyn/aid/1950/>). According to the article, round eyes have long been associated with the ruling class in China since the Mandarins were from Northern Asia where the prevalent eye shape is rounder. Yet only Marie mentioned having round eyes. Rather than feeling privileged, she feels estranged from the rest of her family. In general, I have heard only making negative remarks about plastic surgery although this may change, as they get older. As a final project for a media awareness unit four years ago, one group of eighth grade girls consisting of both Asian Americans and European Americans, researched eye operations and created a satire that was greatly appreciated by the class.

The participants point to bleached-blond hair as a marker for recent immigrants. However, Laurie points out that her mother says there is a derogatory name, “mongrel”, for Chinese who have Western characteristics such as large breasts, or blond hair. Susan, who has desirable Asian hair, is frustrated because it won’t take color. Jessica wishes she had the “raven’s wing” color.

Earlier in that same discussion, Marie says that the illustration of Patty on the cover is ugly because she doesn't look Asian. In some ways, this comment could be viewed as healthy in that Marie is not dominated by Western standards of beauty. However, it also displays the same narrow-mindedness for which she herself has criticized her parents.

My question about why people want to change their appearance elicits two very different responses, although both connect to internalized oppression (Freire, 1992). Marie ("Because they want to look white") directly expresses her frustration with those who reject their culture. Jessica ("Because of neighbors and things") conveys the ethnic community's self-disapprobation. The disequilibrium the participants experience is very evident in the dialogue discussed above. This generation wants to be accepted, but can't quite decide by whom.

#### Identity Negotiation Through Literature

The comments made by these middle school age adolescents clearly illustrate their dilemma. They are caught between wanting to be unique and wanting to fit in with the crowd, feeling uncomfortable with themselves and isolated from others, breaking away from family yet not trusting peers enough to replace the role of family nor able to stand alone. Marie comes closest to defining the role of literature in this identity negotiation when she reacts to her experience reading *Nothing but the Truth (and a Few White Lies)*, "It was fun because you meet all these people whose families are just like ours." Exposing students to books whose characters reflect their life experiences diminishes the feeling of isolation and validates the students' status in the social order. When Marie talks about "meeting" people she is referring both to the characters in the

book she read and to the other students who realize a shared experience through the discussions.

Reading the book alone and answering comprehension questions would not have had the same impact as the group process. Not only were they able to clarify cultural norms of behavior, but in the process of discussing them with a group, render them more acceptable. As they came to know Casey's (*Child of the Owl*) and Patty's (*Nothing but the Truth [and a Few White Lies]*) struggles to define themselves as Chinese Americans, they were able to get a broader perspective on their own identity negotiation.

The changes in Jessica's attitude toward Chinatown and Justin's questioning the intentionality of his conception are examples of the way literature brings insecurities to the surface so they can either be assuaged or overcome. Literature written by authors whose culture mirrors the readers reveals the paths others have taken to achieve the self-acceptance Jessica talks about when she describes the phases of identity. Readers can use these paths as guides for their own journeys (Rosenblatt, 1978).

Jessica attributes her newfound confidence to share her experiences in a "mixed group" directly to her experience in the book discussion groups, both in and outside class. While Susan asserts that teachers have no impact because peers are responsible for causing discomfort, Marie's statement that reading books with characters like herself decreases her feeling of isolation from others counters this assertion. Through literature discussion, students identify commonalities with characters and subsequently with each other.

The group book discussions also helped the participants deal with racism, a factor very much entwined with the identity negotiation of people of color (Espiritu, 1992;



Lowe, 1996; Oni & Winant, 1994; Rodriguez, 2002). When Jessica realizes Casey's father has turned criminal largely because he was denied employment (Yep, 1997) the light goes on. She and the group, without teacher coaching, connect that idea to contemporary examples of racism in the media, demonstrating that they have synthesized the concept. These realizations, especially when they occur while interacting with other, can lead to activism. Few people are capable of carrying a torch on their own. However, solidarity with others can impel them to act. In the sections of my journal where I documented these comments and Jessica's interest in making a movie about Chinatown, I expressed skepticism that the project would actually get off the ground. However, the group immersed themselves, using their own time over weekends and a holiday to complete it.

### Implications for Teaching

#### *Academics*

Reading a book and discussing it a small group provide an extraordinary opportunity to witness the readers' free associations with the book's plot and characters. The book functions as a vehicle for students to think critically about some of the issues they are struggling with (Rosenblatt, 1978). While on occasion they directly discuss the characters' motivations and actions, more often the dialogue is a springboard to test their own perspectives in a public forum.

When I question participants about the amount of Chinese American history or culture presented during their school experience, they answer that there has been very little. Mei and Jessica adamantly call for more. Marie is wary at first about infusing more

about China and Chinese American history because there would be no possibility of doing that for every ethnicity represented by the students.

Marie's response surprises me and I realize during our dialogue I step over the line separating researcher and teacher. While interviewing her, I find it impossible to simply record her ideas. Instead I present counterarguments and perspectives. These are in the form of questions, but mainly rhetorical questions, which I then revise. For example, I say, "Wouldn't you want white Americans to know about your culture, I mean would you want white Americans to know about your culture?" Marie was one of the students I felt closest to in the sixth grade, and I had kept in contact with her over the seventh grade year as well. Of all the students I had, she was one I most expected to become an activist because of her critical thinking skills. Her acceptance of the dominance of Western culture in school disappointed me and made me feel that I hadn't reached her.

Listening to her audiotape I realize that school is a duty for her and she wants to discharge it well. During an earlier discussion she said that her parents had made tremendous sacrifices to come to the U.S. so that she could have a good education, and her end of the bargain was to be the best student she could be. She took this very seriously, which she makes clear in her responses to my questions.

As a bicultural American, Marie clearly has two divergent approaches to identity and goes with the one most appropriate to the situation. She shows a keen sense of equity in her responses (she is the one who first brings up labeling as negative) and wants to ensure that the curriculum is inclusive for all. What she seems to be missing, at least at first, is the existence of a cultural hierarchy with European Americans placed at the apex.

Although the fusion model of multicultural education (LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton 1993) is utopian, I feel strongly that educators must keep it in their sights. When Marie does finally acknowledge my point of view, the clarity and articulation of her analysis makes me wonder if she wasn't previously playing devil's advocate:

“[W]hite people set up our school structure so they're gonna teach what they know best, but now that things are changing, I guess we should change with it, like our school should change with how many people are coming into it, cause we're pretty much staying with the same system we've had for two hundred years, I think.”

Susan is the only participant who says I have spent too much time on Chinese American topics, but then I wonder if it wasn't because she didn't get the option of reading her first choice book, *Esperanza Rising*. She may have picked the *Child of the Owl* group to be with her close friend Jessica instead of her interest in the topic. Of the group she had one of the most positive reactions to *Wooden Fish Songs*, saying it helped her better understand her mother. Her reaction to my question is inconsistent with her earlier response.

Jessica experiences what I would term a major breakthrough in her identity negotiation while reading *Child of the Owl*. Like Casey, Jessica lives with her grandmother, although unlike the character, her parents are also in the home. Like Casey, Jessica's grandmother tells her stories. Initially she speaks negatively about her the stories, saying she tunes them out. As the group completes the book, she proposes that they make a movie about Chinatown as a final project using Deavere Smith's techniques in *Twilight Los Angeles, 1992*. When the group is dubious, she announces that her grandmother will help the group make contacts. Her statement reveals that she has begun

to take a greater interest in her grandmother's life. I find it very gratifying that a school project has brought her closer to a family member.

Every participant who worked on the movie cites that experience as an exemplar of a powerful learning experience. I notice that during the meetings of this literature circle group and the later book discussion group, Jessica begins to relax about her identity. She accepts, embraces, and even criticizes many aspects of her culture she previously kept covert. Being able to do this gives her a voice. Her statement, "I love to talk," contrasts with her previous classroom silence. Teachers should be aware that giving students opportunities to engage in this kind of self-expression can have a significant impact on their lives both in and out of school.

#### Community Building

The participant responses confirm that middle school is a window of opportunity for building bridges across cultures, addressing stereotyping, and thinking critically about labels. The fluidity of identity apparent at this age does not seem to last long. Jessica talks about the voluntary segregation she sees at the neighborhood high school. Olsen's (1997) study of a large California high school also confirms this trend. Although this segregation begins in middle school, cultural, racial and ethnic boundaries are still permeable. While Winston talks about how he is uncomfortable being the only Asian in a group of white guys, he and Justin both express a strong interest in crossing those boundaries. However, they recognize they need help from adults to succeed at forging relationships outside their comfort zone. Mei, because of her religion, is probably the most prepared for multiculturalism. She advocates for the idea that living in America means interacting with a diverse group of people. However, at school her friendships are also mainly

circumscribed by race, perhaps because she is one of a very few who can easily cross boundaries. It is not enough to have one or two isolated students who are able to reach across race and culture. There has to be a critical mass.

#### Growth and Development of the Teacher/Researcher

I have been a teacher for over 20 years in this city, educating populations of middle school students whose backgrounds are racially, ethnically, and culturally different than my own. In addition, I spent the last seven years at one school, working with a primarily Chinese American population. This research has given me a new lens for viewing my students. Listening to the book discussions afforded me, a white teacher, insight into the participants' cultural understandings as I gauged their reactions to various events in the books. While I often assumed a particular character's actions were unique, they would describe it as typically Chinese, and occasionally vice versa.

Part of the professional growth of a teacher is the continuous process of revising assumptions. By focusing in depth on a few students, I have come to appreciate their individuality and diverse perspectives. I think teachers need constant reminding of this uniqueness. Doing this project has made me realize the value of ongoing teacher research, if only to keep my assumptions from crystallizing.

In addition, I have learned more about the biases I bring to teaching as a European American middle class woman. Collecting data from students has made me a better listener, both to students and to myself. For example, in sixth grade we read an historical novel, *Pharaoh's Daughter*, on the Hebrew exodus from Egypt. One of the characters is the Roman appointed king, Herod, referred to in the narrative as a half Jew. The students were confused about his status and what it meant. I attempted to draw an analogy

between the Roman's choice and their own experience, by asking, "Who in this class is half Chinese?" When one girl raised her hand I said, "If the U.S. needed to select someone to represent American interests in China, do you think she would be a good choice?" I was trying to make the point that she would understand and represent two cultures. As I was working out this analogy, I realized the implied racism in my statement, undermining my own goals to instill a vision of multiculturalism in America. Any of my Chinese American students sitting in the class was bicultural, therefore capable of filling that role. I did my best to amend my analogy, and completely revised the explanation in my afternoon class. Before collecting this data, I would have been more likely to let those gaffes slide. Now, knowing the impact of the classroom on identity, I am more sensitive to breaches in the inclusive environment I strive to create.

As a result of this research, I have also become a more astute questioner. Although I have always made an effort to ask open-ended questions, collecting this data has helped me become better at pushing students to explain themselves when their answers seem off course. By doing this I get insights not only into the content, but also into a student's mindset. This way, I can provide better explanations and bridges between their schema and new information. In terms of the process, I learned that as a teacher researcher, having a prior or current relationship with the students was both a limitation and an advantage. Students may have held back certain opinions because of our previous relationship. On the other hand, I had access to information gained over long exposure to the students that an outside researcher would lack.

Realizing how important family is to my students has made me more sensitive to how I discuss family relations. As a result, I have incorporated more strategies that involve analyzing multiple points of view, like role-playing, and debates. While I had previously used these strategies, I now realize why they are successful, as well as when they are most appropriate. It has confirmed for me the power of a piece of literature that reflects students' lives and the necessity of resisting one size fits all programs that deny students access to that literature.

Finally, This research has substantiated the value of pushing students to interact both with each other and with me in ways that extend their comfort zone, like working with diverse partners, and participating in class discussions.

#### Implications for Identity Theory

Early identity studies with immigrants posit a simple linear trajectory: as the immigrant acquires the new culture, he or she drops the old culture (Portes, 1995). More recent studies indicate that immigrants, particularly second or 1.5 generation, can be bicultural, selectively choosing a cultural identity depending on the circumstance (Gibson, 1995; Portes,& Rumbaut, 1996; Tuan, 1998). My research extends that theory, demonstrating that among young adolescents, bicultural identity is not a simple polarity in which an individual chooses to be this or that in a given situation. In fact, for this population bicultural identity is a multifaceted, dynamic, creative, co-constructive process. Characterized by Bhabha's (1994) ideas of hybridity. relationships with family members, peers, and teachers animate the negotiation of multiple identities.

My findings can be summarized with the following points:

- Bicultural identity negotiation is well underway when students begin middle school

- Young adolescents show ambivalence, flexibility, and mutability as they negotiate cultural identities
- Curriculum and pedagogy can have a significant impact on identity negotiation
- Students feel empowered when their cultural history and practices are recognized in school
- Multicultural literature that reflects students' lives can have a beneficial effect on students' self-confidence and ability to successfully negotiate a bicultural identity

#### Limitations of the Study

This study was done in a particular setting. While analogies can be drawn to other settings, the findings may be different. The small sample did not permit control for immigrant generation (some students are second-generation, some are 1.5-generation), socioeconomic status, educational background, or region of family origin.

#### Recommendation for Further Research

Asian Americans have the highest suicide rate among college students in the U.S. (Qin et al, 2008). This fact alone should send researchers scrambling to investigate causes and solutions. However, research on this group is minimal. Research should focus on larger samples, and more control for variables in the sample. More teachers need to be involved in collecting data from their students both for their own professional growth and for the particular contributions they can make to the field. Ideally, a longitudinal study could follow students through high school to track changes in attitudes.

Teacher research is a powerful tool for creating a dynamic classroom. As I collected data from my current and former students, and documented my responses to the findings, I became a more reflective and conscientious practitioner. The reciprocity Paolo



Freire (1992) refers to become systematically operationalized in all my interactions with students. Administrators should be proactive in institutionalizing research as part of every teacher's ongoing professional development.

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#### Young Adult Literature

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## APPENDIX A

## STUDENT SURVEY QUESTIONS

Dear Student

Your early teenage years are a time when many people start to figure out who they are. While a lot of research has been done on this process among high school and college students, very little has been done with middle school students. By answering these questions you are helping educators understand the ways you go through this process. This information can help them create a better school environment for you and other students your age. Thank you for your participation in this survey. If you think I should add other questions please let me know. If there are questions you don't want to answer you have the right to pass.

If you want to talk more about this survey and any ideas it brings up for you I will be available in the morning, at lunch, or after school.

1. Have you ever felt stereotyped? Explain.
2. Have you ever experienced racism? Explain.
3. How do you think the media treats people of your race? Your culture?
  - a. accurately
  - b. inaccurately
  - c. respectfully
  - d. disrespectfully

Explain.

4. Do you spend your free time with people of
  - a. the same race as yours?
  - b. the same culture as yours?
  - c. other races than yours?
  - d. other cultures than yours?
  - e. a mixed group?
5. When you interact with friends from different cultures do you feel
  - a. as comfortable
  - b. less comfortable
  - c. more comfortable
  - d. than you do with friends from your own culture? Explain.
6. When you interact with friends of different races do you feel
  - a. as comfortable
  - b. less comfortable

- c. more comfortable
- d. than you do with friends of your own race? Explain.

7. Do you ever imagine what it would be like to be European American? African American? Latino? Philipino? Other?

8. Do you sometimes feel you would rather be from a different culture? Which one? Explain.

9. How often do you visit the homes of friends who are from a different background?

- a. Daily
- b. Weekly
- c. Monthly
- d. Once in a while
- e. Rarely
- f. Never

If you answered f. skip to question 10

9. When you visit homes of friends who are from a different culture do you feel

- a. very comfortable
- b. mostly comfortable
- c. a little uncomfortable
- d. very uncomfortable?

Explain.

10. Do friends of different races come to your home?

When they visit do you feel do you feel

- a. very comfortable
- b. mostly comfortable
- c. a little uncomfortable
- d. very uncomfortable?

Explain.

11. What do you like about your culture?

What do you dislike about your culture?

12. Who teaches you about your culture?

13. In school do you feel you learn

- a. not enough
- b. just the right amount
- c. too much about your culture.

Explain

14. How much do your teachers know about your culture.

- a. a lot
- b. enough
- c. too little

Explain

15. Do you attend Chinese School?

If not, would you like to go?

If so, do you feel it is worthwhile?

16. How important is it to your parents that you learn a lot about your culture?

Aaa.very important

somewhat important

not important

17. Do you live with grandparents or other relatives who were not born in the U.S.?

How do you like living with them?

## APPENDIX B

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS EXPANDING ON STUDENT SURVEY

The individual students interview will ask participants to expand on the answers they gave for questions 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17 in the survey. The interviews will last approximately 30 minutes and will be conducted in Ms. Gold's classroom during lunch or immediately after school.