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Talking Back to Anti-Asian Racism and Microaggressions: Lessons Learned from Working with Pan-Asian Nonprofit Organizations

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Food for Thought

- **Who** speaks—or can speak—on behalf of AAPI?
- In building an inclusive AAPI community and collective, how do organizers and community members alike address power difference, fragmentation, and hierarchy *within* and *across*?
- How to heal from anti-Asian racism?

Pan-Asian Organizing in the United States

1. Pan-Asian groups emerged in the 1960s during the Civil Rights era to mobilize a collective voice and a political movement to advance pan-Asian interests (Kibria, 2000).
2. The “pan-Asian” or “Asian pan-ethnic” subject position is fraught with *dilemmas*, *tensions*, and *paradoxes* (Chen, 2014; Otis, 2001, etc.).



Case Study 1 (2008-2009)

Center of Peace for Asians (CPA)



- Registered 501(c)(3) NPO founded in 2006
- Aimed to ensure the rights and well-beings of underserved Asians by providing culturally sensitive and comprehensive services
- Crime victims of Asian decent such as domestic violence and related crimes

Research Method

- Case Study Method of Collecting Multiple Perspectives
 - Staff members
 - Volunteering members, including board members
 - Clients



Cross-Status Interview Discourses

| Staff Members | Volunteering Members | Clients |
|--|---|---|
| <p>Asian-ness The “only” Asian-serving agency within the state</p> <p>Client-based Services Counseling and individual case management (Individual-based) Advocacy and Empowerment</p> | <p>Asian-ness Negative valence</p> <p>Helping Asians in need Problematic ascriptions of the clients</p> <p>Infancy of the organization</p> | <p>Helping people to overcome difficulties Referred to CPA</p> <p>Offering <u>dependable</u> care Dependency on the agency</p> <p>Providing <u>free</u> services Class position(s)</p> |

Key Lessons

- Pan-Asian organizing should be **intersectional**. Along with class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, etc., *organizational status positions* matter.
- In articulating the critical issues affecting AAPI communities (e.g., domestic violence, mental health, etc.), how to *simultaneously* serve Asians in need and resist the model minority myth, for instance?

Case Study 2 (2013-2015)

- In 2000, the concept of ACA (Asian Community Alliance) was birthed “around the kitchen table” when four founding women “got together and started talking about the idea of Asian empowerment.”

N = 30 participants interviewed across AAPI communities

| | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Gender | 15 heterosexual men 15 heterosexual women |
| Generation-Based Immigration Status | 14 first-generation immigrants 8 immigrated as a child (a.k.a. 1.5 generation) 8 second-generation immigrants who were born in the United States |

#1 Racializing and Feminizing Discourses of the “Good” Asian (Ethnic)

- Speaking as an Indonesian American/1.5 generation immigrant/Muslim/woman, one participant evoked the discourse of the “good” Asian: *“You’re a good kind of Asian. You’re a good mix of Asian and American.”*
- The racializing/feminizing model minority discourse in this study: *“We are first seen as the model minority. ... You are gonna excel in all these different ways and there are no problems for this particular minority. And we kind of go to fulfill that expectation and act in that way. So, you have to just deny any emotional issue and just focusing on the academic career achievements. ... I know so many Asian kids who are falling apart.”*

#2 Fragmentations and Hierarchies within Racialized Ethnics

- Identifying as a (first-generation) Korean American man belonging to the church, one participant stated: *“For me, I think there was a different classification between Indian American and truly East Asian, North Asian. Indians are taught very well. They’re very articulate. They come across as very intelligent. They have very strong opinions. English in a certain sense is their first language.”*
- **Second-generation Asian Americans:** *“Since I was born and raised in the U.S., I haven’t really identified as being Chinese or Chinese American. When I decide who to socialize with, really, I connect with most other Asian Americans, regardless of whether they’re from Pakistan, or China, or Japan. And really children of immigrants in general, I feel that I connect to that experience as well—of being second generation.”*

#2 Fragmentations and Hierarchies within Racialized Ethnics Cont.

- **Mix-raced Asians**
- Born to parents and grandparents from UK and growing up in India, participant 12's identification as Asian was often challenged: "*I may not look Asian.... With ACA when I went into the community, they would always question me about where I am from. ... They know my accent is Asian. There's an Asian accent when I speak, but they would never say I'm from India or they always would think I'm not Asian.*"

#3 Pan-Asian Organizing as “Togetherness-in-Difference”

- Speaking as a 2nd-generation Vietnamese American, one participant explained what motivated him and his brother to run their restaurant as trying to do Asian-American advocacy: *“Something that I’ve noticed like way different from the kids out in the West Coast, L.A., Orange County area, **they don’t feel ashamed of their culture. They embrace their Vietnamese-ness, Korean-ness, whatever.** When we moved here, we noticed a lot of the Asian kids were either trying to be White or Black.”*

Key Lessons

- Rethink pan-Asian organizing as “**intersectional organizing.**”
- Confront anti-Blackness, sexism, xenophobia and more within and across AAPI communities.
- Interrogated how racialized “good” Asian ethnics are simultaneously gendered (feminine).

”Racial Battle Fatigue” (RBF)

unpacks “the *physiological*, *psychological*, and *behavioral* strain exacted on racially marginalized and stigmatized groups that the amount of energy they expend coping with and fighting against racism” (Smith, 2008, p. 617)

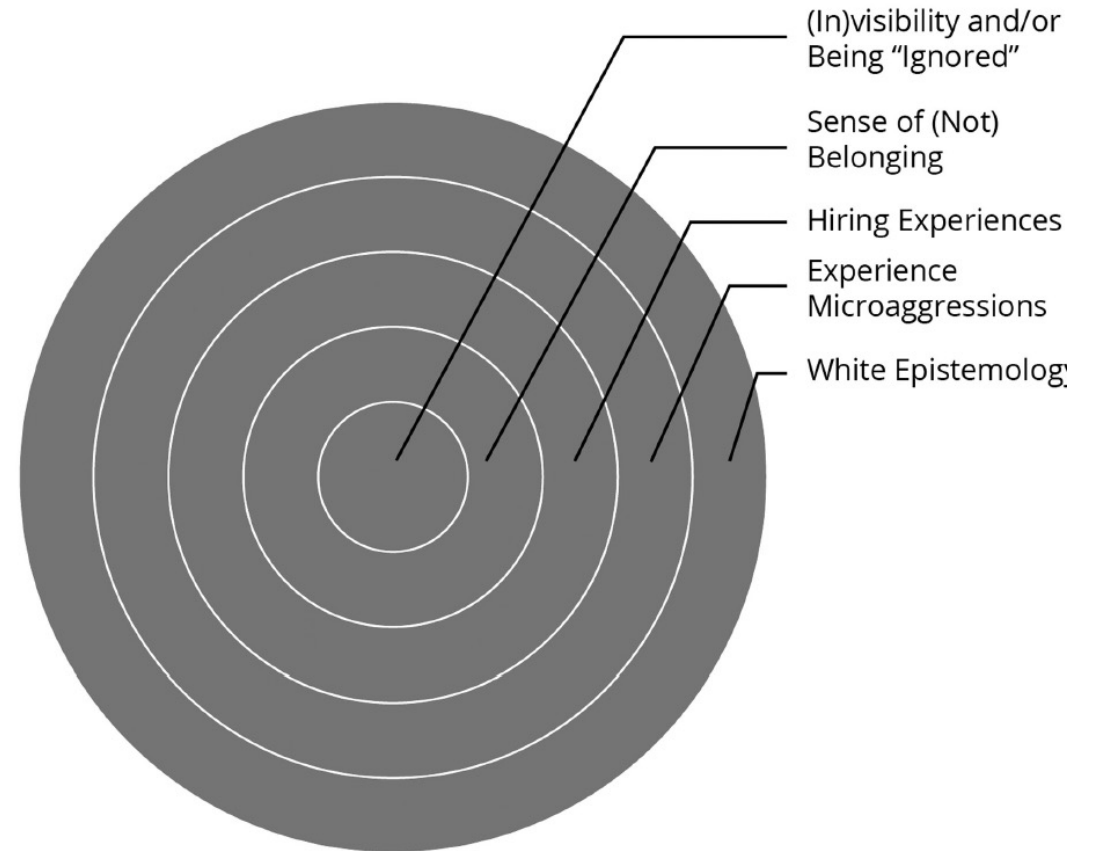


Figure 1.1. Framework of RBF.

THE C.H.A.N.G.E. APPROACH

(Lawless & Chen)

C = Communicate with others about microaggressions

H = Hear others when they say they have been microaggressed

A = Acknowledge when you perpetuate microaggressions and experience them

N = Negotiate differences in understanding microaggressions

G = Grow awareness of the social/cultural impact of microaggressions in society

E = Engage in difficult conversations that will help to end microaggressive behaviors



Thank you!

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