Minority within a Minority Paradox

Asian Experiences in Latino Schools & Communities

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Introduction

Asian[1] students in the United States are often touted as the "model minority" (Lee, 1996; Museus & Kiang, 2009; Takaki, 2008). Pitted against other minority groups and praised as those who should be emulated for academic success, Asian students may as a result find themselves isolated from other groups, unable to make sense of where they belong in the U.S social strata that is defined through race and privilege (Feagin, 2010).

Asians are often described through simplified factors that depict high academic expectations and achievement and over-representation in colleges (Suzuki, 2002; Zhao & Qiu, 2009), particularly in the areas of math and science (Chen & Stevenson, 1995; National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education, 2008). Their perceived success may result in being associated with privilege while at the same time they are also experiencing racial prejudice and discrimination.

This comes as a result of an oversimplification of Asian experiences that, in fact, are anything but homogeneous or simple. Rather, tremendous variability exists within this group that spans different countries, languages, cultures, and economic and political systems (Lee, 1996; Yu, 2006). Although the model minority myth remains active today as the way the mass public perceives and interacts with Asians, research has shown clearly that achievement and over-representation is not independent of these many variables (Museus, in press).

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Unfortunately, society continues to uphold the model minority myth of Asian students, regardless of their particular ethnicity, socioeconomic, cultural, and developmental differences. These students continue to be judged and treated accordingly, particularly in educational contexts (Brydolf, 2009). Teachers often hold expectations that may be beyond what Asian students can meet and their non-Asian peers may also pre-judge them based on a standard that in fact does not exist (Chang & Demyan, 2007; George & Aronson, 2001; Koo, 2010).

Whereas research has shown the downfalls of teachers and other school personnel holding this standard of achievement (Suzuki, 2002), less is known regarding how peers interact with Asians given the various stereotypes they endure. While Asians living and attending schools in predominantly Asian communities may be buffered from the effects of peer prejudice and/or marginalization, Asians who attend schools in which they are a significant minority are likely to experience a different social climate.

This social climate may be particularly problematic when they attend schools in which the predominant student population is another minority group, especially so when that other group is seen as almost a direct opposite—generally described as "underperforming" and lacking in high academic expectations (Foxen, 2010). While research shows that Latina/os in U.S. schools achieve academic success at significantly low rates, these achievement patterns often have little to do with the students' level of intellect, motivation, or expectations (Orellana, 2001). Rather, other socioeconomic and sociopolitical factors impact Latina/os in ways that perpetuate a substandard educational experience (Monzó & Rueda, 2009).

We hold a strong personal interest in this issue. As minorities, we believe strongly that both groups—Asian Americans and Latina/os—are pigeon-holed with particular sterotypical characteristics that often do not accurately describe them in general or in particular. In addition, we believe strongly that as minority groups who experience racial oppression, albeit in different ways, Asian Americans and Latina/os could and should be strong partners in the fight for social justice and equity.

Drawing on Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), we report on narratives of education collected from three young Asian women living in and attending a predominately Latina/o community and school. We explored how Asians and Latina/o groups intersect in a majority minority community. Specifically, we sought to understand:

1. How young Asian women positioned themselves with respect to their Latina/o peers.

2. How race, culture, and stereotypes impacted the friendships they were able to develop, the ways they perceived themselves and their Latina/o peers, and the specific nuances that this minority within a minority context provided.

Asian-American Racialized Experiences

We draw upon CRT in order to understand the sociopolitical contexts within which different minority groups in the U.S. interact. CRT posits race as a primary category through which people of color experience their lives (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Asian Americans are minorities who experience racial oppression through its various manifestations, including stereotypes, racial "joking," and a job ceiling that limits their advancement to positions of power, even though some may outperform their dominant group peers academically (Kim & Yeh, 2002).

Although this academic achievement pattern makes Asian Americans seem often to be treated differently from other

minority groups in the United States (i.e., Latina/os, Blacks, Native Americans), they have not been able to infiltrate contexts of power dominated by Whites (Pang, Han, & Pang, 2011; CARE, 2010). They are still the "other," marginalized socially and structurally in U.S. society.

CRT hones in on how sustained images of Asian Americans as "different" from a White frame supports racial oppression and legitimizes the privilege of Whites (Teranishi, 2009). CRT is derived from critical theory (Kanpol, 1999), radical feminism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012), and other epistemologies and theories, and emerged from critical legal studies scholars who critiqued the primacy given to class issues in critical theory (Taylor, 2009).

CRT has since been utilized in various fields, including education, where it is drawn upon to investigate and challenge the injustices of race, racism, color-blindness, equal opportunity, and meritocracy (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001), as well as how race is used to position certain groups for political purposes and the sole benefit of the dominant group.

Solórzano and Yosso (2009) defined CRT as both a theory and method that seeks to embed race and racism in research while incorporating the intersectionality of race, gender, and class issues. It is fundamentally a theoretical framework for understanding the experiences of people of color but also "a liberatory or transformative response to racial, gender, and class oppression" (p. 133). It has a stated goal of eradicating disparities and empowering people who experience subordination.

Depicted as the "Model Minority"

The most highly researched aspect of Asian experiences in the United States is their depiction by the mass media and the general public as the "model minority." This model minority depiction began with an article entitled "Success Story" published in 1966 in the *U.S. News and World Report* that created an image of the Chinese-American population as a minority group to be emulated for their academic achievements. The story claimed that the academic and economic success of Chinese Americans was superior to other minority groups and that they achieved this success without receiving any assistance.

The stereotype portrays Chinese Americans to be smart, family-oriented, humble, and hard-working (Young & Pang, 1995). They have been called the academic superstars (Lee, 1996). Indeed, while Asians and Pacific Islanders make up less than 6% of the total population, they are considered the fastest-growing sector of students attending college (Chang, Park, Lin, Poon, & Nakanishi, 2007; U. S. Census Bureau, 2000). In 2008, Asians graduated from college at a rate of 50% compared to Latinos who graduated at 12.9%, Blacks who graduated at 17.5%, and Whites at 30.7% (PEW Hispanic Center, 2008).

However, these patterns for Asian Americans generally are a result of being commonly homogenized into one massive category despite the fact that in reality they are extremely diverse in ethnicity, speaking over 100 different languages, and practicing widely divergent cultural traditions, religious affiliations, income levels, and English language proficiency (Koo & Chi, 2010; Museus, in press).

More specifically, Asian subpopulations, such as Chinese, Vietnamese, and Filipino groups, consider themselves diverse based upon their cultural roots. Research that has disaggregated data among diverse Asian-American groups has found that, not surprisingly, the Asian-American groups that have the highest academic and economic achievements are those that have come to the United States with cultural and economic capital and therefore have been able to mobilize themselves through social networks that help them gain access to academic, economic, and other resources (Museus, in press).

Groups that have come with less cultural and economic capital and whose families experienced little education in their countries of origins have been shown to fare similarly to Latinos. Indeed disaggregating Asian Americans by country of origin reveals that some groups fare significantly more poorly in comparison to their peers. For example, Asian Indian, Pakistani, Chinese, Korean, and Japanese populations have a higher percentage of people who have a bachelor's degree or higher degree compared to Cambodians, Laotian, Hmong, and Vietnamese who typically have only a high school diploma or less (National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education, 2011).

Thus, the model minority status has been clearly shown to be a myth about Asian Americans (Zhao & Qiu, 2009). However, through mass media outlets, Asian Americans are portrayed in ways that sustain the myth. This is why even among those who have never heard or read about the model minority myth, many people will point to Asian Americans and make assumptions that they have high academic aspirations and expectations, that they are overachievers, that they are highly intelligent in the areas of math and/or science, and that they achieve well in school.

This myth supports the status quo in varying ways. First, it diminishes opportunities and access to the many Asian Americans who need additional support to achieve well in schools and beyond. Second, it pits other minorities and Asian Americans against each other when vying for resources that all minority groups need. This creates resentment between groups and serves to fragment their power in numbers—even though many of these groups have similar interests and concerns.

Minority Group Relations: Asian and Latina/o Students

In California, minorities combined are now in the majority, the largest of these being Latina/os (Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Gardner, Robey, & Smith, 1989). Because of this, California is often considered the majority minority state. Asian Americans also make up a large portion of California's population and although they were previously enclosed in ethnic enclaves in many of the major cities, the immigration explosion of the past two decades has resulted in a tremendous spillover of Asian Americans into predominantly Latina/o communities (Gardner, et al., 1989; National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education, 2010).

This is an interesting dilemma in that Latina/os have stereotypes in almost direct opposition to the Asian model minority stereotype. Latina/os are perceived as the "underachievers" who lack academic expectations and motivation (Gardner, et al., 1989). Indeed the Latina/o high school drop-out rate is the highest in comparison to other major groups (Gardner, et al., 1989). Not surprisingly, Latinos are underrepresented in higher education (Fry, 2002; Gándara, 2009).

The National Center for Education Statistics, quoted in the President's Advisory Commission in 2003, noted that there are

> . . . less than 43% of Hispanic high school students [who] are qualified to enroll in four-year institutions. Of those who qualify to attend, approximately 40% will enroll in college immediately after high school graduation. (as cited in Saunders and Serna, 2004, p. 147)

The report noted that approximately 10% of Hispanic Americans have graduated from a postsecondary institution. These figures demonstrate that the traditional

school system fails to support the academic pathways of Latina/os.

Given these very different—almost opposing—stereotypes regarding academic potential and achievement patterns among Asian Americans and Latina/os, an important concern is how Asians who live in a predominately Latina/o community identify themselves and how they are perceived. An ultimate goal for us, concerned with social justice, was to first understand the impact that these stereotypes have on the relationships between Asian and Latina/o youth in order to interrupt the stereotypes that pit Asians and Latina/os against each other, in the hope that they may ultimately work together toward mutual goals.

There is an assumption held by society that interactions among Asian and Latina/os will be characterized by tensions that elucidate the increasing struggle over "economic resources, educational policies, employment opportunities, religious practices, and political power" (Gibbs, 1999, p. 4). While this struggle is evidenced through macro-level, structural forces that include tracking, job ceilings, and cultural supremacy, actual racialized experiences are instantiated through everyday microagressions.

Racial microaggressions are "brief commonplace daily, verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group" (Sue et al., 2007, p. 273). There are three forms of microaggressions: microassault, microinsult, and microinvalidation. Microassault is a purposeful attack that is racially based that uses verbal and nonverbal mannerisms. Microinsult "is characterized by communications that convey rudeness and insensitivity and demean a person's racial heritage or identity" (p. 274). Microinvalidation is the exclusion or negation of psychological thoughts and experiences of the other.

A number of studies indicate that both Asian and Latina/o students experience racial micoragressions in schools, often by dominant group members. Less is known of whether these microagressions take place between racial and ethnic minority groups and particularly between Asian and Latina/o students.

Method

This study was conceived by the first author, who heads a non-profit organization that provides college access programs and services to support students' trajectory to go to and graduate from college. She shared her interest in the topic of studying the experiences of Asian students living in predominantly Latina/o communities and Latina/o students living in predominantly Asian communities.

The second author is an Asian American engaged with similar lines of research on the model minority theory who was approached by the first author in order to learn about ways in which to research the effectiveness of the programs she offers.

All of the data were gathered by the first author and the initial interpretations were hers as well. The second author played a mentoring role in refocusing the purpose and rationale of the research, engaging in further analysis, and writing the results for publication.

Our Subjectivities

As we embarked on this work in our respective roles, we were very much aware of the complexity of studying these issues that we have personally experienced and of the need to constantly interrogate our assumptions and beliefs and the histories from which they developed. In the course of participating in this project we explored these beliefs and questioned them in critical ways. Below are snippets of who we are and our reflections.

First Author. My personal story prefaces my study of minorities living in another minority community. I grew up in Los Angeles and went to a school that had predominately African-American and Latina/o students. Asians and White students were few and if Asians attended my school, they were Southeast Asians. At this school, I experienced name-calling, such as "chink."

Throughout my life my inner circle of friends were predominately of different ethnicities other than Asian, I then experienced culture shock and an ethnic shift when I moved to the suburbs and attended a high school in which my culture was numerically represented. About 60% of the student body was Asian with Koreans as the majority. I began to rediscover my roots. I noticed Asians and non-Asians had certain stereotypes about each other. We all made fun of our own race and teachers had preconceived notions about us. Asians were categorized into certain groups: nerds, FOBS (those recently immigrated), gangsters (students who got into fights), and White-washed Twinkies (yellow on the outside but White on the inside). Even with these groupings, Asians were almost always were considered the "model minorities" who excelled in school, community, and life.

My experience in different communities sparked an interest in seeing how Asians were perceived in communities where Asians are not predominately represented. I speculated whether stereotypes continue to perpetuate where minorities within another minority are present. If this is the case, these stereotypes may reveal how the mainstream dominant society may continue to instill false claims about minority groups and create tension amongst each other. If we did this to each other, I wondered what would happen when they found themselves in other communities. My hope in doing this work was to find possibilities where different minority groups could unite and work together rather than against each other.

Second Author. As an Asian American, I grew up almost exclusively with middle class European Americans. I was one of the only Asians in my elementary and middle schools. I never really understood the complexities of racial and ethnic divisions among students until high school.

I made a personal decision to attend a prestigious high school in which I had to take and pass an entrance exam. The high school consisted of approximately 47% Asian. During my high school career I encountered many stereotypes that are pervasive in the field today. Teachers would assume that I should be in advanced placement courses because I was Asian. Similarly, teachers thought that I did not try hard enough if I was not in the advanced courses. My peers would question my "Asianess" if I did not receive a passing grade on a test.

My way of embracing the stereotypes was to give into the expectations and push myself harder to prove the "doubters" wrong. Looking back at my education, I embraced the stereotypes as a way to "fit in" with society's expectations. My interest in this work stems from the expectations that permeate our public school system today. It is my hope that through this line of research we can begin to build bridges to overcome the factors that divide minorities in education today.

Situated Context: Part of Larger Study on Youth Mentoring

This article reports on the narratives collected via conversations with three Asian students but also draws on data on these same students that were collected

through a larger study of a youth mentoring program that targeted low-income, female, 11th and 12th grade students. The nonprofit organization exists to provide comprehensive programs and services designed to help students develop necessary competencies to graduate from high school, succeed in college, excel professionally, and live a life with character and excellence. The organization provides college readiness and access services through workshops, presentations, summer camps, mentoring programs, and other services.

Youth mentoring program. The program provided a means whereby female students in an economically and educationally depressed community could prepare for college, become leaders, be involved in leadership activities, teach and mentor other high school students, and better themselves educationally and economically. Students received college readiness and preparation services, such as attending college fairs and receiving mentoring and participating in other events.

The purpose of the project was to engage in societal issues in their community and acquire the skill set to become better at dealing with various issues whether it meant graduating from high school and entering college or acquiring the skills that will prepare them for the 21st Century workforce. The program provided a venue for these students to openly discuss family, school, community, race, immigration, and societal issues as they affect their personal growth and development.

Through multiple modes of engagement, students were provided a platform to critically examine inequities within their schools and community. Overall, the program provided students an opportunity to take on leadership roles that impact their lives and those of others while preparing for college.

City context. The program aims to address the educational disparity of students in a city that is predominantly Latina/o (referred to here as LC). According to the 2010 Census, LC has about 80.1% residents of Hispanic origins, 14.1% Asians, 0.8% American Indian, 1.2% African Americans, and 0.1% of Pacific Islanders. About 29.9% of the population is under 18 years of age. It is estimated that around 82.9% speak another language. According to 2010 data, 12.2% received at least a bachelor's degree.

The city only has one school district with two public high schools and one continuing education school. The two high schools are ranked two out of ten according to the academic performance index state rank. Both high schools have about 89-91% Latina/o students and over 70% receive free or reduced lunch.

Participants

Three Asian-American students were selected from a pool of students currently participating in a larger action research study from a nonprofit organization.[2] The action research study focuses on how low-income Latina/o and Asian female students prepared their peers for college through a semi-structured student college preparatory and leadership training program to address the educational disparity of students in the city. Students mentored other students and created a sustainable youth-led program that empowered them to take action in their lives and in their communities. Student program participants benefited from having been taught the ACT curriculum, which is aligned with state required course content standards that can be used as a vehicle for them to become competitive in the college application process.

Participant observations of two students were conducted over an eight-month period and with the third student for at least four months. The length of face-to-face contact was due to the program's cohort structure. Two students began the program in 2009 and the other student began in January of 2011. Observations took place in various settings, but most of the time, observations were taken at the organization's office.

This larger project brings Latina/o and Asian students from predominantly underachieving schools to develop skills for college enrollment and attainment. All three students are U.S. citizens and live as well as attend a high school in a predominantly Latina/o community.

Kelly (11th grade female students, 16 years of age). Born in America and raised in LC, she considers herself as both Chinese and Vietnamese. She is the middle child, sandwiched between her older sister and younger brother. Her mother is Chinese and speaks Chaochow and her father is Vietnamese. Prior to the interview, she would assertively mention she did not speak Vietnamese or Chaochow. However, during phone conversations, you could hear her speak to her mother in her native language at the office. When the family needs assistance, she provided extra support and helped her mother at the store. She seemed to be closer to her mother and more distant from her father even though he would pick her up from the center when she needed a ride home.

In school, she was positioned in the top 10% of her class with a grade point average around 4.0. She was active in her cross-country team, enjoys math, and hoped to become a math teacher. She took Spanish as a foreign language, loves math, and hoped to become a teacher one day. She mentioned she had many friends, including her assembly friend, classroom friend, and walking to class friend.

Hanna (11th grade, 17 years of age). She was born in a refugee camp in Hong Kong and was raised for a couple of years in Vietnam by her grandmother before she arrived to the United States. Due to the Vietnam War, she and her family escaped to a refugee camp hosted by Hong Kong so that they had an opportunity to gain U.S citizenship. After eight years at the camp, they were able to immigrate to the United States. She and her family lived on the East Coast for about five years before moving to the West Coast. Prior to the research, she confidently stated she was unable to speak her native language.

Academically, she was ranked in the top 10% at her school. She took rigorous courses except for math and Spanish. She was considered the smartest student at her school, which has an Academic Performance Index (API) ranking of three out of ten, with ten as the highest. During her fifth period, she was bussed to a nearby high school to take AP Chemistry.

Previously, she was the Vice President of her class, but at the time of our research she was no longer associated with student government. She participated in badminton and Key Club. She was the historian and oversaw numerous Key Clubs from neighboring schools. For the project, she was one of the leaders that taught and lectured academic subjects to help her peers prepare for the college entrance exam.

Jane (12th grade, 18 years of age). As a second generation immigrant, she was born in America and raised in LC her whole life. She is the middle of three siblings. When asked about her ethnicity, she identified herself as "American Filipino"[3] because she feels she is more American. Rather somewhat disconnected to her culture, she hoped to have some knowledge. She was willing to learn Tagalog, one of the main languages in the Philippines, because she and her siblings did not speak the language very well. Her

parents spoke Tagalog and they usually replied in English.

At the time of the interview, she was ranked in the top 10% in her class and had been actively playing volleyball at her school. She had a passion to learn and help others. When her classmates needed help, she willingly provided academic assistance. For example, she held study sessions at her home for her classmates to prepare for the Advanced Placement exam. Jane taught and mentored her peers and other high school students in the program.

She saw the positive in everyone and did not like to put people down. When other students demeaned and devalued certain high school teachers, she would stand up and state that the teachers were excellent and wonderful.

Sources of Data

A series of two open-ended interviews with Jane and Hanna and three open-ended interviews with Kelly were conducted individually over the course of three months. Student interviews consisted of both semi-structured and non-structured questions, which allowed the conversation to be less rigid.

Each interview lasted approximately one hour in length, was audio-recorded using a specialized pen that records written and voice data. Due to time constraints, some interviews were less than an hour. The interviews were transcribed and then coded for themes.

For this research two observations and two sets of field notes were used to analyze the findings. The observations took place during two leadership meetings that were part of the college preparatory mentoring program. The students were associated with a college preparatory program, which included leadership training sessions that were held from once a week to three times a week, test preparation course sessions on Saturdays, college tours in the fall and spring, and field trips to a youth summit.

Participant observations of two students were conducted over an eight-month period and of the other student for at least four months. The length of face-to-face contact was due to the program's cohort structure. Two of the students began the program in 2009 and the other student began in January of 2011. Observations took place in various settings, but most of the time observations were undertaken at the organization's office.

Two of the field notes sets were taken during a city council meeting, which gave one of the participants an opportunity to present in front of the mayor and city council members. This meeting was the first time the first author met Kelly. One last field note was written from a meeting the first author held with a school official where the students attended school. The two observation and two sets of field notes were used to triangulate with the student interviews.

Data Analysis

Data analysis occurred in several stages. Initially, the audio-recordings were transcribed. Open coding was used to classify different topics and code then into themes. The open coded themes were interpreted and analyzed for axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The themes were gathered to understand the complexities of Asian students living and attending school in a predominately Latino community. In addition, member checks were conducted with all of the participants to ensure accuracy of their responses and perceptions.

Findings

The purpose of the research was to understand the complexities of minority students living and attending school in a predominately minority community that is ethnically different from those students. The findings focus on four concepts: minority to minority racialized experiences, the bell curve demystified, friendship formation, and where is my home?

All three Asian students were asked about their experiences living in a predominately Latina/o community, how they identified themselves, and how they established friendship networks. When they were asked how the predominately Latina/o community perceived them, they all stated Chinese or Asian. When students were asked to describe themselves, Kelly stated she was Vietnamese and Chinese. Hanna identified herself as Chinese, and Jane self-identified herself as American Filipino because she was born in America.

> I am definitely Americanized…different from people born in the Philippines. I am proud to be both Filipino and American. I'm an American first. I also have this Filipino background and I should be maintaining because it is part of my family and me. It's my roots. It's where I come from. Since I was born in America, I should grow in my American identity but I shouldn't forget where I came from and where my parents came from.

Minority to Minority Racialized Experiences

Data revealed that Asian students experienced racism and felt like the "other" in relation to all groups, including other Asians and most specifically when the larger majority were Latina/os. When asked about Asian stereotypes from the perspective of the majority group, Hanna stated that Asians were perceived as someone to get picked on, to be ignored, and to not really be respected. All three of the students agreed that some Asian characteristics included being weak, quiet, good at school, smart, and hard workers. In addition, they were perceived to carry a big backpack, lots of books, and big calculators.

Kelly declared she liked to break stereotypes even though she did not see herself as a different race. She mentioned that Asians play badminton and she preferred to participate in a different sport at school. While she expounded on Asian stereotypes, there were some stereotypes she was unable to avoid according to her perception. For instance, she scored low in English and carried a large calculator. With the exception of trying to defy the usual Asian stereotypes, she maintained her desire to be perceived as a smart person. The perception of her smartness gave her the desire to try harder and study more. When asked about her teachers' perceptions, she acknowledged they had similar stereotypes about Asians.

> Oh, quiet, you know, hard working. I'm a really talkative person, and I'm like out there, they're like, "Whoa, [Hanna]. That's not what I thought of you."

Experiences of being "othered" for Kelly and Hanna began in elementary school. Both of them were called names and felt different. Kelly did not want to see herself different, but the Latina/o students made it obvious she was not included in conversations and groups. She avoided seeing people as just their race but judged people by their cliques.

> I don't see myself as a different race . . . They see me as a different race . . . At times, it does happen. When it does, I try to make it as obvious that I'm not a different race. Like when I notice I'm the only Asian in a sport or church affiliation . . . I don't like to view people as just a race. I judge by cliques. Cliques are everywhere. The jocks, the *cholitas*, our little gangsters or whatever they call themselves. Then there's the band people. Then there's people who just hang around with each other, but I don't know.

On the other hand, when she was

asked about feeling "othered," put down, or discriminated against, she mentioned that she represses these feelings. "Like when I am left out, I don't take it to the butt." When she encountered certain racialized moments in her life, she wondered why it happened to her because she did not choose it. There was one incident she shared with regard to a young Latino boy who made her "annoyed and pissed off" because he said *Konnichiwa,* which means "good afternoon" in Japanese and possibly other Asian words.

> I just wish I had spoken Spanish perfectly so I can be [say] you know what, that's not even nice . . . I should have said something to him and so he can stop saying those racist comments because that hurts . . . but he is a little kid and he does not have to know about these kinds of things.

Although Kelly experienced such difficulties with Latina/os, she sustained her friendships and desire to associate herself with them. One major impetus that drew her away from her own ethnic group was the loss of her best friend and her group of friends in middle school. Her middle school friends consisted of Chinese, Vietnamese, Filipino, and other Asians. She perceived this group to not be loyal because focused their attention on gaining social status. Due to experiencing a difficult situation with her middle school Asian friends, she preferred to befriend her minority majority friends. She commented that Asians made her uncomfortable because she needed to initiate conversations. Another reason for her shift in friendships was correlated simply to the Latina/o population density. "That's how we grew up. They were all around us."

Hanna began hearing racist comments, such as the word *china* (which translates to Chinese girl in Spanish), during elementary school. From her perspective, she believed the word was used in a racially insensitive manner even though she realized that *china* is the proper term to describe a Chinese girl in Spanish. At her elementary and middle school, which was densely populated by Latina/os, she recalled that her Latina/o friends would mock her cultural differences.

Even during the interview, she still did not understand why her own Latina/o friends were cruel to her since she did not feel very different from her fellow classmates. She recalled an offensive comment about Asians having weird traditions, such as setting up arranged marriages for twelve-year olds. "I was so offended . . . This was what I grew up with. I felt isolated."

She was not aware of overt racism until she was a little older and began consciously seeing her peers according to their race. Her awareness of their differences resulted in a deliberate decision—she began to associate herself only with Asians. She found that maintaining friendships with peers who shared a similar culture was easier because she no longer felt like an outsider.

Nonchalantly, she refrained from holding grudges; however, she mentioned some such feelings were still there. She attributed this racialized experience to a lack of respect for Asians. At this moment, she did not want to generalize regarding all Latina/os, but rather viewed this phenomenon of racialized oppression as a "societal thing."

> Asians are not seen with high respect. They are seen as kung fu people, bad, [and] nerdy girls and boys in the media. No one talks about Asians doing something super cool . . . People in the [city] who don't know me perceive me to be quiet and studious.

Jane, on the other hand, described her strong relationships with the community and her Latina/o friends. Rather than seeing differences, she saw similarities in familial relationships and friendships with students who were Latina/o. She provided two racialized examples that occurred within her own ethnic group and another Asian group. In a "fun" manner, she was perceived as a "coconut" from a Filipino group who spoke Tagalog, the national Filipino language. In return, she called the group FOBS—fresh off the boat.

Although she was Filipino, she saw herself as different from other immigrated Filipino students. "You see a difference in the generation." Although she tried to learn how to speak Tagalog, the Filipino students teased her because of her accent and the mispronunciation of some of the words. Because she grew up in a predominately Latina/o community, when she met other Filipinos, she stated,

> It was weird. I never saw so many Filipinos in one place besides going to family things or one of these reunions or going to [name] city because every Filipino shops there.

Because the first generation Filipino students recognized that she didn't have the ability to fully relate to them, mostly due to the lack of experience of growing up in the Philippines, there was a subtle disconnect between her and that group. However, she quickly mentioned how she met another "coconut" and soon became friends with her because they shared that lack of experience.

However, there were examples when she was interested in learning Tagalog when she saw other Filipino Americans who embraced their culture and language. When two new Filipino coaches began coaching volleyball during her freshman year, she had a desire to learn more about her own familial background.

> Two new coaches came in for the guys' team and they were both Filipinos. And so they were exposed to culture thing, because . . . they spoke really good in English and you would [have] thought that they were born here. No, they were born here, but they knew Tagalog real well and were cultured . . . and it was like oh wow, like they took the time out of their lives to learn the language, and I didn't. So, I started watching more TFC, the Filipino channel, which I described to you.

Another example that troubled her occurred outside the city. She experienced unfair treatment from a different Asian minority group at an Asian restaurant. Her family and she were the first Asian customers to order food. When a large group of Asians from the nationality aligned with the restauarant's ethnic food entered the restaurant, the waitress forgot her family's order and did not bring their meals. Her family complained, but their orders and food were not acknowledged until the dominant Asian group started getting their food. This event struck an accord with her, which caused her to cry profusely. However she did not see this specifically as racism, but rather she attributed this event to poor service and the other Asian group receiving special treatment.

On a separate occasion, Jane described how stereotypes perpetuate vis-à-vis the media. She understood how media depicted images of ethnic groups and the more people watch it, the more they believe it. For her, she became aware of the "faulty logic" that was embedded in society.

> The whole perception is . . . Asians are supposed to be good at math, so, therefore, I need to be good at math. I am good at math, so I guess it's true. Yeah, I've had that really faulty logic going on, but after reading more and watching news more . . . and obtaining knowledge just from talking to different people made me realize what the hell was I thinking . . . my whole perception changed . . . like I grew and I realized that I had such a closed mind . . . and I realized that my parents have always been teaching me you shouldn't follow those stereotypes.

The study participants were asked

if there were any commonalities betwen Asians and Latina/os. Hanna mentioned that immigration issues caused the groups to be similar.

> People come from different parts of the world and they are looking for opportunities for their children. Both cultures emphasize working hard and earning to get what you want. Some are morals . . . . how mothers treat their children.

The three participants were asked about their perceptions of the majority group at their school and in the community. Perceived as a communal group, one student mentioned that schools concentrate their effort on educating Latina/os who are perceived to "cause trouble." When asked to further describe Latina/os, Hanna mentioned how everyone has interesting background stories that bring them to a place where they are now, "But no one shares it and everyone misunderstands each other."

The Bell Curve for Minorities

Given the perceived stereotypes of Asians doing well in school, the students were asked to reference how Asians and Latina/os perform academically at their specific schools. Currently, two of the participants are ranked first in their high school class and one of the participants is ranked in the top 10% of her class. With a perceived demographic estimate of 10% Asian students at the school, the participants provided a glimpse of how Asians perform relative to Latina/os. One of the participants viewed Latina/os to be less motivated to learn in school. From observing Latina/o students in the classroom, one participant assumed Latina/os did not care about school.

> They are all Hispanics with a few other Asians. They joke around, complain about work, and complain about the teacher. I know we aren't doing much [classwork]. They goof around and they don't want to work. They make faces when they have to get back to work. I've been there enough to tell that they don't care about the teacher's attitude.

After the above statement, she quickly mentioned students' adherence to education was not a direct correlation to their race but due to the teacher's attitude. The participant reiterated her point to make sure she was not providing negative perceptions of the Latina/o group.

Although Asians were in the top honors and Advanced Placement classes, Kelly upheld Latina/os as a group who also excelled in math and were top students as well. Jane declared there was an equal balance of Asians and Latina/os performing both well and poor, but overall she mentioned that Latina/os largely performed academically better than Asians. She expounded on which ethnic groups were ranked among the top ten in her senior class—three Filipinos and seven Latinos. In junior high, she stated that Latina/os were predominately in her Geometry class, a math subject that is usually taken in high school.

In Kelly's junior class, four out of 27 students in her AP U.S. History class were Asians compared to the Latina/o majority. Equally distributed in her AP Calculus AB class were Asians and Latina/os, compared to her regular English class with two Asians out of 27 students. In a discussion with Latina and Asian students during a leadership meeting, all three affirmed that there were an equal balance of Asian and Latina/o students in honors and Advanced Placement classes.

Overall, the three participants noticed that there were more Latina/o students who were in their honors and Advanced Placement courses. Yet, with regards to school recognition, Asians seemed to be at the forefront. "They hear constant names, or they see people doing so well . . . Asians . . . get plenty of award . . . they hear it all the time," asserted Jane.

Friendship Formation

Friendship formation allows students to develop social skills. In the interviews the participants provided information regarding their close network of friends. For Jane and Kelly, most of their closest friends were Latina/os while Hanna's friends were comprised of Asian males.

Jane revealed a combination of both Latina/o and Asian friends. At school, Jane spends time with a group of four or five students, two Latina/os and one Vietnamese male near a tree that is located at the center quad. At school, Jane provided an enlightening comment about where she spent her time during school hours. She and Hanna, although they do not hang out with each other, spend most of their time around a big tree. She noted that different groups surrounded the four sections of the tree—these groups consisted primarily of Asians, Filipinos, White Filipinos, Vietnamese, other Asian ethnicities, and a few Latina/o students.

The Filipinos predominately "stick together around that tree." They are separated into a Filipino girls group and a White Filipino group. It was disclosed that Asian immigrant students stayed near the tree as well. Although the majority of Asians were located in a particular section, Jane's four or five school friends were a conglomerate of Hispanic and male Vietnamese and Filipino students. When asked if students self-segregated, she mentioned that such balkanization was attributed to interests and "based on what you're talking about."

However, when asked about her friends, she provided detailed encounters of how she developed her friendships with Latina students. She formed these close friendships during her elementary and junior high years, where they participated in a college preparatory class for first generation students and took advanced math classes together.

It was not altogether clear, but it seemed as though Jane spent more time with her best friends who were Latinas by visiting their homes and in other outing events. During holiday functions, such as Thanksgiving, Jane's family would invite her close friends and families to their homes. She expressed great pleasure that she and her friends' families had became very close.

Kelly was also asked about who her school friends were. She first indicated that her friends consisted of Asians, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Filipinos. Upon further investigation of her friendship formation patterns, she revealed that her best friend had moved away. Starting in middle school, she felt a lack of connection with her Asian counterparts due to their desires to maintain their "social status." I asked if her friends were mainly Asians. With a quick response, she stated that she had more Mexican/Latina/o friends.

While in high school, Kelly left her Asian friends and became "independent or a loner" by staying in the library. At times, her library friend would join her. After her sophomore year, she began spending some time with her "solid" group of friends who comprised of two Mexicans and two Asians. They met during lunch unless she was preoccupied running errands or doing her homework. While these "solid" friends were available, a strong bond was not formed. Often, she was not informed or invited when they spent time outside of school.

For Kelly, it was apparent she engaged herself with establishing friends everywhere she went due to the fact that she had "different groups" of friends in different places. She had a library friend, an assembly friend, and sports friends. Although she stressed her friendship

towards "Mexicans," she revealed that she maintained friendships with diverse groups of people.

For Hanna, her school friends were comprised mainly of Asian males who are involved with a popular Asian school club. They spend their time near the tree where the other Asian groups met. Although she does not know how she came to situate herself with Asian males, she recollected that her two Filipino best friends moved to a different city and school district. When her friends left, she was strongly impacted. Currently, she rarely talks to or spends time with them. Besides her male friends, she mentioned having one female Vietnamese friend, but due to both their competitive and controlling natures, they only spend time studying or hanging out intermitantly after school.

Where Is My Home?

The predominately Latina/o community is often perceived to be gang infested and dangerous. The city has had a bad reputation and is in a continual process of seeking to change its image. Regardles of this negative reputation, the city continues to be community oriented. Hanna explained that the city was perceived to be "ghetto"—however, she did not believe it was true. After school, she would freely walk to the organization's office while listening to her iPod.

> I don't think its true. I don't think its a ghetto. Within the community . . . there is a sense of togetherness for other people.

Although she revealed a different outlook about the city's perpetual myth, she also indicated that does not feel included. She has not fely at home or well situated in the city since she arrived four years ago. She and her family go outside of the city because there is nothing for them to do. In addition, she mentioned that she did not feel involved.

Hanna revealed the difficulty her mother experiences with the members of the community. She notices how her mother struggles to converse with community members.

> It makes sense, there's a language and cultural barrier. My mom can't speak to a Hispanic [Latina] lady and she can't speak to my mom.

Since the city has a population of over 70% speaking Spanish as their home language, a language barrier arises with ethnic groups whose first language is not Spanish. With the Spanish language being a barrier for non-Spanish speaking groups, all three participants study Spanish as a second language. Kelly perceived speaking Spanish as a way to draw closer to her Mexican and Latina/o friends. Despite the language differences, all three indicated that they enjoy the situation. One of them summed it up:

> Isn't it obvious? I'm glad I live in a different race than mine because I get to learn about different cultures.

Jane and Kelly had a positive outlook towards the community. Although open-ended questions were asked to discover the stereotypes or perceptions of Latina/os, Jane refrained from providing any negative comments. In her interviews and during leadership discussion meetings, she always bestowed positive praises about her close Latino/a friends. Kelly, although she experienced exclusion from both her Asian and Latina/o counterparts, continued to favor the Latina/o community and Latina/os.

Besides cultural and language differences among these ethnic groups, economics also contributes to divergence, with some who live on the wealthy side of the city and others who live in poor neighborhoods. Even in a predominately low-income city, various communities have labels. Depending on where a family lived, it was considered a "better neighborhood" or a "dangerous neighborhood." Jane's personal experience living in a certain area gave us the impetus to include her statement in this research even though it represents limited data.

Ever since Jane and her family lived in the community, they stayed in apartments near the freeway. She remembered the area to be pleasant with neighbors playing their music or people partying every weekend. For her, she felt comfortable and did not notice that there were any problems living in that particular neighborhood. Yet when she first attended junior high school, she learned that where she lived defined her. She heard classmates saying things like, "Everyone was like, you live by the apartments? . . . You didn't know? . . . that's on the weekend?" That neighborhood was known to the community to be an undesirable place to live by because of a combination of factors including its proximity to the freeway and its notorious reputation of having residents that engaged in certain activities. The stigma that came with the neighborhood was one of the factors that fueled her family to move away from the neighborhood.

Discussion

The stories of these participants showcases the complexities of Asians living in a Latina/o community. This research intersects race, gender, identity, and class issues through a CRT lens and reveals how stereotypes continue to perpetuate within mainstream society vis-à-vis the media. These interviews not only provided an in-depth look at the dichotomy of race and ethnicities in the community but also provided a space for these student voices to be heard (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Their stories were used to further investigate the marginalized or oppressed nuances they have experienced.

As a result, Asians in this study continue to perpetuate the model minority stereotypes by remaining quiet about their injustices, internalizing some stereotypes while disassociating others, and repressing racialized experiences by reframing them as a joke. Other times, Asians tried to break the stereotypes they deemed negative by trying to uphold the positive stereotype of being "smart."

Yet, even though these participants desired to diverge from perceived stereotypes, they too often fell right back into the Asian stereotypes that the dominant society created. The participants were confronted with racism and microaggressions (Sue et al., 2007) as they were ridiculed for being of a certain ethnic race and being devalued for their Asian background. Without considering differences as positives, they experienced being "othered" by outward statements and insults, conceived as microinsults (Sue et al., 2007).

An aspect that still needs to be explored and expanded upon is the impact Latina/o and dominant cultures have in influencing Asian students' identity and culture formation. This exploration has the potential to provide a deeper understanding of the influence of the dominant Latina/o and mainstream culture on other minority groups.

In order to fully understand Asian students in a predominately Latina/o community, each Asian students' background needs to be examined thoroughly. Usually Asians are homogenized into one group and thus their differences are not carefully examined. In their research, Chang, Park, Lin, Poon, and Nakanishi (2007) disaggregated data among Asian groups based on education, immigration status, socioeconomic status, and much more. In order to strengthen the findings of our study, students' ethnicity and their identity

model of assimilation and acculturation should be explored (Nadal, 2001) as well as examination of identity using a feminist theory as the theoretical framework.

Race has been used to explain or justify students' academic performance in schools. As Asian students are aligned with White students, they are also seen to be the model minority when compared with other minority groups (Sue et al., 2007). This research study debunked the dismal statistics of Latina/os falling behind their Asian counterparts and illuminates a new view of academic success for Latina/os. In a predominately Latina/o community, this study provided a glimpse of the vast range of Latina/os who excelled in school, especially in honors and advanced placement courses. The stories of the participants here revealed that Latina/os excel in ways similar to or better than their Asian counterparts in this community. Thus, in this contextualized research study the perceived binary comparison of Asians and Latina/os counters the argument that Asians excel academically compared to Latina/os.

One last point to be addressed is the notion of cultural capital and social capital. In a community with students who are predominately first generation and low-income students, studies have examined the importance of obtaining cultural capital and social capital through pre-college and mentoring programs, in order to assist students to navigate their educational pipeline (Perna & Swail, 2001; Saunders & Serna, 2004). In this study, we provided a modified term called *community capital*. Grounded by Coleman and colleagues (1966), *community capital* was framed to focus on the "financial, human, and social capital in a family as a powerful influences on schooling (as cited in Porfeli, Wang, Audette, McColl, & Algozzine, 2009).

Although we are using the same terminology, we differentiate the term in order to investigate the knowledge a person needs to succeed while living in a community that is not predominately of his or her own ethnic background. In some cities, it is obvious which families live in homes that have an increased real estate value compared to other homes. Yet, when the entire community is low-income and comprised of different ethnic groups, it is difficult to decipher which areas are safe or better than others.

For instance, Jane was not aware that the apartment complex she lived in from birth through junior high was located in a "bad" neighborhood. Jane's peers perceived her in a certain way for living in "that apartment." Because she was not "in," she did not know she was living in the "ghetto" (very poor) side of town. For her to join "in," her family relocated. While this concept of community capital has not been expounded thoroughly, it is a component that calls out for further exploration.

Conclusion and Implications

This limited study provides stories of three Asian students as they seek to understand the complexities of living in multiethnic communities that were dominated by Latina/o groups. Asian students navigated their experiences in a Latina/o community while negotiating their identity between the Asian, Latina/o, and dominant cultures. While this research needs further investigation, this article provided a path for exploring race, educational attainment, and identity in the context of minority communities. As a society whose members are immersed with diverse cultures, this study provides an understanding of how certain words or connotations towards an ethnic group or race may be racist and hurtful. Minorities who experience racism and ethnic stereotypes need avenues for healthy healing.

Students and educators need to understand the complexities and subtle forms of racism minority students experience in schools. Thus, explicit instruction on diversity and cultural capital should be implemented in schools to address the impact of the racial microagressions students face today (Sue et al., 2007). Additionally, investigating how minorities perform in predominately Latina/o communities and how Latina/os perform in Asian communities could provide a platform for unraveling the complexities of achievement in diverse communities.

In order to break the cycle of racial profiling of minority groups in academia, research must continue to address the inequities that are pervasive in schools today. Therefore, future research in exploring the complexities of minorities living within a community dominated by a majority/minority is needed.

Notes

[1] *Asian* will be used interchangeably with *Asian Americans* and *Asian American Pacific Islanders.*

[2] All names are psydonyms to respect the privacy of study participants.

[3] Jane now self-identifies herself as Filipino American.

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