

CHINESE AMERICAN FEMALE IDENTITY

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To my amazing daughter, Marisa, who provides me inspiration,

and

To my beloved husband, David, for his unending support

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## CHAPTER I:

### CHINESE AMERICAN FEMALE IDENTITY

#### Introduction

This study centers on the identities of Chinese American women. Here, identity consists of an individual's sense of self and group. In other words, the negotiation and emergence of particular identities<sup>1</sup> reflects how one understands and responds to others. Historically, power imbalances exist between groups that affect how identities are created and recreated. For example, as long as Asian Americans remain "invisible minorities," and suffer the inequities of systematic marginalization, their prospects of better understanding their role and identity as Asian Americans are hurt. In particular because stereotypes of the dominant society are often reflected in understandings of self, stereotypes distort Asian Americans' self-conception and affect the development of a positive sense of ethnic identity. For instance, the "model minority" stereotype suggests that Asians and Asian Americans are hard working individuals who can and have overcome barriers to emerge as successful minority members. Though this stereotype appears to carry positive connotations, this image is a myth for many Asians and Asian Americans, and it is a hegemonic device employed to create tensions among racial-ethnic groups. Given that a history of oppression and stereotyping can lead to identity formation problems, exploring one's racial-ethnic identity can create a sense of understanding through reconceptualizing past perceptions into new and positive ideals of the self and group. In other words, because one's racial-ethnic identity can reflect the acceptance of stereotypes about self, the exploration and reformulation of its meaning can bring about a sense of strength and validation to self and group.

Racial-ethnic identity exploration is theorized in social-psychological approaches to identity formation. A major sub-field of these theories includes models of ethnic identity development. The models suggest that minority group members initially accept dominant group perceptions and stereotypes of their group. Following an encounter or series of encounters that

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<sup>1</sup> Here "identity" refers to the self-conceptions one derives from the social roles one holds and the social positions one performs (McCall and Simmons 1966; Stryker and Serpe 1982), self-conceptions one develops through group membership (Tajfel 1978; Turner et al. 1994), and the attitudes/perceptions one holds towards one's own ethnic group (Memmi 1965; Hayano 1981), which, when taken together, constitute a description of self.



stimulate a reconceptualization of previously held beliefs, minority group members reject these stereotypes and arrive at new and more positive images of their group and themselves. However, these theories are problematic for three reasons. First, empirical evidence suggests that individuals' identifications are contextually dependent and much more complex than described in ethnic identity development models. Second, it is not clear from the empirical evidence whether ethnic identity development models apply as well to Chinese Americans as they seem to do to other minority members, for whom they were initially developed. Third, developmental models seem to ignore the fact that individuals hold multiple identities in addition to their racial/ethnic identities, such as gender and class identities. These additional identities may complicate racial-ethnic identity formation. Consequently, the purpose of this study is to examine existing racial-ethnic identity development models to assess their utility for Chinese American women. This study asks: To what extent do Chinese American female college students identify as Chinese American (or pan-ethnically as Asian American)? What process leads to their current identification? Was this process consistent with existing ethnic identity development models, or could it be better described by broader social-psychological and sociological theories of identity formation? In sum, the overall goal of this study is to examine the racial-ethnic identity formation of Chinese American women and to assess the utility of existing racial-ethnic identity theories for explaining their self-conceptions.

The study strives to contribute to identity literature for the following reasons: first, empirical research has dealt mostly with other ethnic groups and they do not differentiate between the experiences of men and women. Given that each group's experiences and understandings are different, the findings regarding their identity formation should add to the ethnic group literature. Second, the study examines the significance of developmental models of ethnic identity and other broader social-psych theories of identity. How these theories contribute to racial-ethnic identity formation (if they do at all) should also be of consequence.

### Statement of the Problem and Research Question

Approaching the goal of this study, I distinguish between stereotypical and non-stereotypical identifications as a Chinese American. In the first scenario, Stereotypical Chinese American Identification (SCAI), one accepts society-imposed descriptions of a Chinese American. These descriptions, regardless of whether they are interpreted in a positive or

negative light, have negative implications. For example, Asian women may perceive the stereotype of “exotic-ness” as appealing because the description implies that the individual is “unique” or “different.” However, this “uniqueness” of being Asian or of Asian descent objectifies Asian women. SCAI reflects an internalization of the prevailing beliefs about what it is and means to be Chinese American, and therefore it represents a negative consequence, or at least an uninformed or distorted perception, about self and group. It can reflect a belief in the dominant group’s perception of Chinese Americans which are often developed and perpetuated to enhance the image and position of dominant group members and can also be employed to denigrate and/or pigeon-hole the images of Chinese. It may also suggest the outright disregard of positive images of Chinese Americans as descriptive of self and group. In contrast, a Non-stereotypical Chinese American Identification (NCAI) suggests a redefined Chinese American identity that rejects stereotypical beliefs regarding minorities and is therefore a psychologically healthier conception of the self and group. In addition, it implies discarding negative images of Chinese Americans as characteristic of the self and group. NCAI refers to a group identification based not on the dominant group’s perception of what Chinese Americans should be (or are), but on perceptions created by Chinese Americans themselves and how this creates a boundary for group membership.

This study also draws a distinction between the terms “ethnicity” and “race” because they are often used interchangeably to represent the same concept. Ethnicity and race are similar in one sense when both terms refer to group distinctions based on “race, religion, or natural origin” (Gordon 1964). Here, physical, cultural, linguistic, and religious characteristics can describe one’s ethnicity. On the other hand, if physical characteristics are excluded, then the term ethnicity is limited to cultural (e.g., language) or national-origin/ancestral characteristics. It is important to distinguish between the terms, especially in reference to racial/ethnic minority groups.

Examining the historical experiences of racial/ethnic minority groups demonstrates that race “has been a social construction that has historically set apart racial minorities from European immigrant groups” (Takaki 1993: 10). For example, the experiences of Italian immigrants differed from Chinese immigrants because Italians could gradually integrate and assimilate into white society, whereas the Chinese could not (for political and social reasons). In addition, white-ethnics have the option to be “ethnic,” depending on the situation (Waters 1990).

In contrast, because racial minorities are viewed by the dominant society as “different,” they do not have the ethnic options allotted to white-ethnics.

This study recognizes the distinction between ethnicity and race. The study employs the term “racial-ethnic” in recognition of the differential treatment experienced by white-ethnics and subordinated racial groups. Specifically in this study, Chinese Americans are perceived by the larger society as both “racially” and “ethnically” different: racially they are seen as physically different and ethnically they are understood as being culturally, linguistically and religiously different. Consequently, the term racial-ethnic will be used throughout this dissertation.

This study also draws attention to the significance to ethnic and pan-ethnic identities (*Chinese American* versus *Asian American*, respectively). Here, *ethnic* identity is defined in a number of different, yet similar ways: Smith (1991) argues that ethnic identity is the identification “by people who share a common history and culture, who may be identifiable because they share similar physical features and values and who, through the process of interacting with each other and establishing boundaries with others, identify themselves as being a member of that group” (Smith 1991: 181). Barth (1969) describes ethnic identity as the role an individual plays. The role depends upon the ascriptive ethnic labeling of oneself as well as by others. In other words, ethnic identity reflects classifications by self and by others. Thus, depending on context and interaction with others, one’s ethnic identity will change -- i.e., ethnic identities are “situational.” Nagel (1994) defines ethnic identity as the product of the constant reconstruction of boundaries and meanings surrounding ethnicity (Nagel 1994: 153). She suggests that as ethnicity continues to change and redefine itself, the meaning of one’s ethnic identity also changes. Ethnicity, and thus ethnic identity changes “according to variations in the situations and audiences encountered” (Nagel 1994: 154). This study defines ethnic identity as identification with others of a perceived shared history and culture, which is dependent upon context or situation and interaction with others.

A *pan-ethnic* identity refers to the “construction of larger-scale affiliations where groups previously unrelated in culture and descent submerge their differences and assume a common identity” (Espiritu 1992: 3). A pan-ethnic identity is the coming together of various groups under a larger umbrella term. Ethnic identity differs from pan-ethnic identity in that the latter identity is a culmination of a number of more specific/delimited ethnic identities. While both forms of identity involve a seemingly constant reconstruction of definition, ethnic identity

denotes a greater specificity to a particular group membership. Pan-ethnic identity suggests a greater degree of malleability regarding group membership than an ethnic identity because a pan-ethnic label's boundaries are more vague and ambiguous. For example, pan-Asian ethnicity refers to identification with others based on the recognition of "a common Asian American heritage out of diverse histories" (Espiritu 1992: 17). This identification can be based on a number of different components- e.g., a shared history of exploitation, oppression and discrimination. However, a Chinese ethnic identity refers to a more narrowly defined set of definitions (e.g., ancestral ties, cultural traditions, etc.) by which one classifies oneself and is classified.

Given the fluidity and situationality of (ethnic and pan-ethnic) identity (Lian 1982; Lott 1998; Lowe 1991; Yeh and Huang 1995), it is important to inquire why, if, and under what conditions individuals choose an ethnic label versus a pan-ethnic label (e.g., political, economic reasons). According to Espiritu, a pan-ethnic group refers to "a politico-cultural collectivity made up of peoples of several, hitherto distinct, tribal or national origins" (Espiritu 1992: 2). She suggests that the coming together of diverse groups reflects "the symbolic reinterpretation of a group's common history, particularly when this history involves racial subjugation" (Espiritu 1992: 9). But more importantly, Espiritu emphasizes the structural conditions that manipulate and guide the content of a pan-Asian ethnic identity. Such conditions include the imposition of the label by a dominant group over less powerful groups, as well as the infusion of a new political meaning to the label created by Asian Americans as a tool to obtain resources from the dominant group (Espiritu 1992: 161).

It is important to consider pan-ethnic identity in my analysis of an ethnic group (i.e., Chinese Americans) in order to recognize the impact of the former identity on the latter. Given the structural nature of pan-ethnic identity, how does this impact one's racial-ethnic identity? Do Asian Americans develop a positive sense of self and group identity by combating and redefining dominant-group imposed labels? Or, does the formation of a pan-Asian identity signify a final step in the development of a non-stereotyped racial-ethnic identity?

The reader may note that identity development literature encompasses many forms of identity, including exploration into *class* identity development (Cochrane and Addy 1996; Zandy 1996), as well as *gender* identity development (Chodorow 1978; Josselson 1987; Lindsey 1994; Segura and Pierce 1993), and the reader may question my emphasis on *racial-ethnic* and *pan-*

*ethnic* identity development. Rather than focus on the development of each of these identities, or the salience of other identities, I draw attention to the intricacies of identity formation among female racial/ethnic minorities- specifically, Chinese American women. As mentioned above, existing theories of ethnic identity development assume that minority group members develop positive perceptions of self and group over time. The literature also has focused predominantly on black and Hispanic ethnic identity development. Studies which do examine Asian Americans fail to differentiate between Asian sub-groups, particularly for women. Thus, this study asks whether *Chinese American women* demonstrate the same progression from stereotyped to non-stereotyped identities as it seems to happen among other racial-ethnic minorities.

### Race, Class, and Gender: Interlocking Systems of Domination

Given that we live in a racist, patriarchal, and classist society, power imbalances exist between groups of individuals, which function to privilege certain groups and their ideologies over others. One result of such power imbalances is its effects on how individuals “racially” perceive self and group. For example, for white Americans, this may manifest itself in the belief of superiority and entitlement over people of color; for people of color, this may entail feelings of shame regarding minority group membership, at least initially. More specifically, for people of color, identity formation involves developing an understanding and acceptance of positive aspects of their identity in a racist, oppressive and discriminatory society. To emerge with a positive racial-ethnic identity, racial minorities must overcome racist stereotypes and dominant group perceptions of racial/ethnic group inferiority.

It is imperative to have a clear understanding of the concepts of race and racism and how they relate to Chinese American experiences. Understanding the relationship between race/racism and Chinese Americans’ experience enables one to better analyze and explain their identity formation. Given that the meaning of race and the practice of racism differs historically, due to changing social, political, and economic factors, and because identities are shaped by such named factors, this study is grounded in both sociology and history.

Historically, “race has been a profound determinant of one’s political rights, one’s location in the labor market, and indeed one’s sense of ‘identity’” (Omi and Winant 1994: 1). The concept of race initially developed as a biological construct with a “scientific” foundation that proposed a “‘natural’ basis of racial hierarchy” (Omi and Winant 1994: 63). Scientific

scholars proclaimed that a distinct ranking of human “species” existed, which in turn “justified the inequitable allocation of political and social rights” (Omi and Winant 1994: 64). In extension, the scientific justification of a hierarchy among the human species allowed European Americans to believe and purport their superiority and their resultant entitlement to the privileges of society, while it simultaneously denigrated and withheld most rights and resources from those of non-Northern and Western European origin.

Today, biological notions of racial superiority still persist although race is now understood by scholars to be a social concept whose meaning is dependent upon fluctuating political, historical and economical conditions. The meaning of race changes as groups within a society establish and challenge its definition and their positions in the social structure (King and DaCosta 1996; Omi and Winant 1994; Wellman 1993).

Built upon the notion of race is racism. Racism is the ideological and structural, institutional and individual, subordination and discrimination of a population of people to exclude them from the privileges of American society. Specifically, white racism involves the

Individual thoughts[,] . . . socialized ideologies and omnipresent practices based on entrenched racialized beliefs. . . . These patterns of highly racialized thought are embedded in the culture and institutions of a white-centered society (Feagin and Vera 1995: x).

Because racialized thoughts and beliefs are found in all structures of society, they consequently shape how whites behave, who in turn maintain and perpetuate institutionalized racism. Racism remains and persists because it has been institutionalized and thus has been taken for granted (Feagin and Vera 1995: xiii).

A common misconception regarding racism is that it is “equated with an intense prejudice and hatred of the racially different” (Blauner 1972: 9), allowing those who equate racism with prejudice to “exempt themselves from responsibility and involvement [in a racist society by] taking comfort in their own ‘favorable’ attitudes towards minority groups” (Blauner 1972: 9). In other words, racism, simply defined as prejudiced attitudes, fails to identify the institutionalized maintenance of racism. According to Blauner, racial oppression is the process whereby a

Dominant group, which thinks of itself as distinct and superior, raises its social position by exploiting, controlling and keeping down others who are categorized in racial or ethnic terms. When one or more groups are excluded from equal participation in society and from a fair share of values, other groups not so

excluded and dominated are correspondingly elevated in position (Blauner 1972: 22).

Central to the existence of racial oppression is privilege-- the “unfair advantage, a preferential situation or systematic ‘headstart’ in the pursuit of social values” (Blauner 1972: 22). It is because of the existence and desired preservation of this privilege that racial oppression exists.

Racism serves to justify the unequal access to privileges and resources for people of color. For political and economic reasons, racism exists to preserve the advantages that whites have accrued at the expense of people of color. It also serves to explain the inequality that exists today as if race were the determining factor for the “downward plight” of certain groups, while also explaining the “surprising progress” of other groups. Racism perpetuates the belief that certain groups justifiably deserve certain privileges and others do not, without venturing to offer that historical, economical, and political conditions and circumstances play any role in the past and present-day location of various ethnic minority groups.

Taken together, we find that institutionalized racism permeates our society and secures advantages for whites at the expense of people of color. Its existence on an institutionalized level (through such white-controlled institutions as government, schools, and media) filters into our daily lives. For people of color, institutionalized racism fosters internalized racism-- which is the practice of accepting incorrect and harmful images and beliefs about one’s ethnic group as defined by the dominant group (Yamato 1995: 73). As people of color come to believe the dominant society’s message that they are inferior and different, they accept and rationalize discrimination and prejudice directed towards them. They support positive images of white Americans while simultaneously internalizing the dominant view of their inferiority (Espiritu 1997: 87-88).

Thus, given that racism permeates our society, and that Asians represent a disempowered group who are directly affected by this oppressive system (ideologically and structurally), how does this affect the racial-ethnic identity development of Chinese Americans? How does one overcome racist ideologies and emerge with a non-stereotyped, positive racial-ethnic identity? Racial-ethnic identity models (to be described below) offer an answer.

Like race, patriarchy is a domination system that affects identity construction. Patriarchy relegates the position of women subordinate to that of men. In this system, women’s identities are affected by the subtle and/or blatant sexist portrayals and treatment of women by the larger

society as well as within the private sphere. To emerge with a positive female identity, women must shed the internalized stereotypes and beliefs of their inferior status and value relative to that of men.

Social class is a third domination system that affects identities. The social structure creates and maintains social classes, which results in a power imbalance among groups in terms of access to resources and material goods and the ability to dominate others. Recognition of class differences as they intersect with institutionalized racism and gender oppression further exemplifies the complexities of identity formation.

Race, class, and gender represent interlocking systems of domination that simultaneously affect the experiences of all people. Viewing such systems as interconnected requires a reconceptualization that systems of oppression are not simply additive, but work concurrently to structure people's lives (Andersen and Collins 1995; Collins 1990; King 1988). In addition, this mode of thinking encourages accounting for other forms of oppression affecting one's life (e.g., age, religion, etc.) and one's role as both oppressor and oppressed. For example, homosexual Asian men are penalized by their race and sexual orientation but privileged by their gender.

This "matrix of domination" functions on three levels such that people experience and resist oppression on a) the level of biography, b) the group or community level, and c) the systemic level of social institutions (Collins 1990: 227). On the individual level, one's unique ties to others can form oppressive situations (e.g., domestic violence). On the group level, cultural context conditions the experience of or resistance to domination. For example, class and gender interact when "the culture of patriarchy enables capitalists to benefit from the exploitation of the labor of both men and women" (Espiritu 1997: 4). Likewise, when a dominant group attempts to replace a subordinate group's ideologies and ways of life with its own, the subordinate group is further dominated. Lastly, dominant-group controlled social institutions such as schools, churches, and the media serve to convey dominant group ideologies and interests (Collins 1990: 227-228). These institutions enable the dominant group to mold individuals to serve their interests, thereby preventing the subordinate group from fully pursuing and achieving its own pursuits, concerns, and needs. It should be noted that though individuals and groups may experience oppression on three such levels, they are also free agents who can and do develop alternative ways of expression and resistance (if conditions allow for resistance).



Specifically for Asian Americans, the matrix of domination “restricts their material lives, (re)defines their gender roles, and provides material for degrading and exaggerated sexual representations of Asian men and women in the U.S. popular culture” (Espiritu 1997: 13). On the individual level, Asian men (as the oppressor) may choose to dominate those less powerful, such as the women and children in their lives. Yet, on the institutional level, Asian men are dominated through majority group ideology (e.g., the media) which depicts Asian men as effeminate. On the group level, capitalists exploit the labor of these men, creating economic dependency on their wives which often fosters negative feelings about self. Asian women must navigate between resisting racist ideologies facing their community while also attempting to prevent alienation from Asian men when battling male privilege. Also, Asian women must reject racialized gender ideologies that advance the sexist objectification of (Asian) women, the feminization of Asian men, and the advancement of white men as the most desirable partners (Espiritu 1997: 14).

Recognizing the interlocking nature of race, class, and gender enables us to realize that the “conditions of our lives are connected to and shaped by the conditions of others’ lives” (Espiritu 1997: 17). Acknowledging that race, class, and gender are integral factors affecting our experiences forces us to address structural hierarchies and inequalities. In addition, the awareness of how race, class, and gender affects our lives contributes to our understanding of how multiple social identities operate. Given that race, class, and gender are prevalent forms of oppression affecting all people in multiple ways, it is important to account for their effects on the identity of Chinese American women. Note, the study will not examine the *interactions* of race, class and gender, nor will it explore how identity formation may differ depending on one’s race, class and/or gender. Rather, race, class and gender are held constant, and this study asks how does the interconnected nature of race, gender, and class affect the process of identity formation<sup>2</sup>? That is, what is the racial-ethnic identity formation among Chinese American female college-aged students?

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<sup>2</sup> In addition, the study does not examine or contrast all or even some identity combinations. Such analysis is beyond the scope of this thesis.

## Literature Review

Because the primary focus of this dissertation is on racial-ethnic identity formation and its applicability to Chinese American women, I will first describe Ethnic Identity Development models and in so doing, problematic issues will become apparent. Then, empirical literature will be employed which further suggests that the developmental approach is questionable theoretically and empirically.

### Social-Psychological Theories of Identity: An Overview

A sub-field of social psychology includes theories and models of racial-ethnic identity that emerged around the early 1970s primarily in response to the Civil Rights Movement. Like social psychological theories of social identity, racial-ethnic identity theories examine the interaction between self and group. However, unlike some other social psychological theories to be described later, ethnic identity theories stress the presence of racial-ethnic power dynamics (including structures and ideologies) that inherently affect ethnic identities' formation and content. Racial-ethnic theories attempt to present the psychological stages associated with identity changes as experienced by oppressed people as they try to understand themselves living as minorities in a dominant group-ruled society.

In the sections that follow, I will describe Ethnic Identity Development Models and broader Social-Psychological approaches to identity formation to understand how and why respondents negotiate particular identities. In addition, the applicability and utility of these theoretical approaches may be explored and further illuminated by asking whether Asian/Chinese Americans emulate the stages as suggested by ethnic identity theories or do they more actively construct and negotiate their identities as indicated by broader social-psychological theories? We can further ask, can or should developmental and interactionist approaches to identity be integrated or will another approach emerge which better explains Chinese American female identity formation?

### Ethnic Identity Development Models

Most models of ethnic identity development were based on African American experiences (e.g., Cross 1971; Jackson 1972; Thomas 1971; Vontress 1971). Models for other

ethnic/racial minority groups stem from these earlier archetypes. The following includes five examples of ethnic identity development models, beginning with the *first* developmental model, originated by Cross.

#### Subordinated/oppressed group models

In 1971, Cross presented a model of *nigrescence* which described a developmental process by which blacks achieved a positive black identity. The linear model described four distinct stages: Pre-Encounter, Encounter, Immersion-Emersion, and Internalization. Cross hypothesized that one's initial perception of ethnic-self was devalued, and through nigrescence, one's perception evolved to an acceptance of a positive black identity.

In 1991, Cross revised his model to demonstrate the transformation of a non-Afrocentric identity to one that is Afrocentrically aligned (Cross 1991: 190). He posits that there are five phases (rather than four) to the development of black identity: Pre-encounter, Encounter, Immersion-Emersion, Internalization, and Internalization-Commitment. Cross notes that an individual can complete a nigrescence cycle at any point in his/her life, and he/she can recycle through various stages if a new "encounter" triggers new thoughts about his/her blackness.

In the *Pre-encounter* stage, blackness does not play a significant role in an individual's everyday life. He/she often has little knowledge of black history and culture, and thus may believe in the white dominant ideology of his/her inferiority. In this Eurocentric cultural frame of mind, the individual will often strive for assimilation or integration into the dominant society.

In second stage, *Encounter*, the individual experiences an encounter (or series of encounters) that triggers a change in the ways that he/she feels about him/herself and about his/her blackness. In other words, the encounter forces the individual to re-evaluate past perceptions of self and how he/she viewed the self through Eurocentric eyes. The individual questions the meaning of blackness and its role in the conditions in which he/she is living. Consequently, the Pre-encounter person is dying and the "Afrocentric" person begins to emerge. At this point, blackness takes on a new meaning for the individual.

In the third stage, *Immersion-Emersion*, the individual decides to change his/her old ways and build a new frame of reference. The individual "immerses" him/herself into black culture and into those things relevant to blackness. Accompanying this stage are intense emotions and negative feelings towards whites and an emerging sense of black cultural pride.

In the fourth stage, *Internalization*, the individual experiences a shift from intense feelings, emotions, and actions towards whites to that of a controlled and open understanding of black conditions; he/she “internalizes” black culture. In addition, he/she moves from an individual standpoint to a group identity. This change in standpoint allows the individual to see the self as part of a group and enables the individual to empathize with other oppressed groups. Sometimes this new group identification “bridges” the individual to other individuals of oppressed groups. The last stage, *Internalization-Commitment*, is not much different from the fourth stage except that the internalization of blackness is sustained for a long period of time and presumably represents a commitment to a positive ethnic identity.

In this model, we see that black Americans move through phases to achieve a positive black identity. They move from accepting negative white views and beliefs about blacks, to recognizing oppression, to rejecting white ideologies, to immersing themselves into black culture, resulting in a positive image and identity about blackness, while recognizing oppression as a prevalent system in American society.

Following the introduction of Cross’s black identity development model, Gay (1985) reconstructed Cross’s five-stage developmental process into a three-stage paradigm<sup>3</sup>: Pre-Encounter, Encounter, and Post-Encounter.

In stage 1, *Pre-Encounter*, a person’s ethnic identity is not fully conscious but is “dominated by Euro-American values and conceptions of ethnicity” (Gay 1985: 44). In this stage, two levels of *Pre-Encounter* ethnicity are apparent: one level can be described as pre-consciousness, pre-cognitive, or pre-conceptual ethnic identification. At this level, “ethnicity has not been systematically incorporated into one’s reasoning, valuing, and feeling structure” (Gay 1985: 44). Ethnicity does not explicitly affect attitudes or behaviors. At the second level, one “thinks of the world as anti-Black. All things associated with Whites are deified while anything Black is considered derogatory” (Gay 1985: 45). Also at this stage, individuals use white standards to determine what is good.

Stage 2, *Encounter*, represents the next stage of ethnic identity transformation. It involves two aspects- “an event or set of events and reactions to these occurrences” (Gay 1985: 46). The first aspect, the “encounter,” is an experience or event that shatters a person’s current

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<sup>3</sup> Gay reconstructed Cross’s model to facilitate her discussion regarding ethnic identity development and educational/learning development and processes.

feelings about his/her ethnic self and group (Gay 1985: 46). Consequently, the individual finds him/herself deliberately thinking about his/her ethnicity for the first time, or rethinking his/her existing beliefs and values about his/her ethnic identity and group membership (Gay 1985: 46).

The response to the “encounter” is to search for new ways to reconstruct one’s ethnic identity. The individual is very likely to have high levels of egocentric and ethnocentric views, causing him/her to withdraw from the white world and what it represents. Thus, he/she turns inward and immerses him/herself into his/her own racial/ethnic history and cultural heritage (Gay 1985: 47).

After the individual immerses him/herself in black history and culture, an “emersion” process begins when the extremist parts of these attitudes and behaviors begin to decline. The individual establishes a more balanced basis for interactive relations:

[E]thnocentrism, and ethnic intolerance for others, and psychological defensiveness are replaced with more dispassionate, reasoned, and critical analysis of self ethnic group experiences. . . . The person begins to incorporate selected aspects of the total ethnic experience into his or her identity profile (Gay 1985: 48).

Thus, s/he desires to become a totally integrated ethnic being.

The person has progressed to the *Post-Encounter* stage when self control, awareness, psychological openness, and critical analysis predominate in ethnic attitudes and behaviors. In this stage, the individual experiences inner security, self-confidence and pride in one’s ethnicity as conflicts between old and new world views are resolved (Gay 1985: 48). After the “transformed ethnic identity is internalized, individuals have the psychological disposition and ethnic receptivity to be biethnic, multiethnic and/or globalistic in their relations if they so choose” (Gay 1985: 49).

Gay’s model suggests that ethnic minority individuals can move through three stages to achieve a positive ethnic identification. This process involves feelings of esteem for all things white while experiencing denigration of ethnic pride, followed by an encounter which propels the individual to re-evaluate his/her feelings and beliefs regarding the white world and what it represents and to turn inward to search and immerse him/herself into his/her cultural and historical heritage. Lastly, the individual finds pride in his/her ethnicity and internalizes this ethnic identity. Once this is achieved, the individual has the capacity to become biethnic, multiethnic, and/or globalistic in how he/she chooses to perceive and relate in his/her world.

Though it appears that Gay provides a more comprehensive model of black identity development, her paradigm lacks the detail of Cross's model. By condensing the stages, the model does not adequately address the complexities of ethnic identity development; condensing the stages implies a simplicity of ethnic identity development.

However, the developmental descriptions of Cross and Gay's black identity models are useful to the study of Chinese American identity in that like blacks, Chinese Americans represent a racially oppressed group who may experience a similar process of identity development. However, are Chinese Americans very likely to have a Eurocentric frame of mind before developing an Asian American/Chinese American consciousness and identity? How do differences in the perceptions of different racial-ethnic groups by the dominant group affect perceptions of self? In other words, because blacks and Asians are perceived differently by the dominant group (in most contexts, blacks are regarded with more hostility, Asians with relatively less), how does this affect self-perception? How closely will Chinese Americans emulate Cross or Gay's identity development model?

Atkinson et al. (1979), based on earlier studies of oppressed groups (e.g., Cross), proposed a five-stage Minority Identity Development (MID) model. Atkinson et al. proposed that black identity studies can be generalized to other minority groups because they too are oppressed. This theoretical model was proposed to aid counselors in understanding minority client attitudes and behaviors (Atkinson et al. 1979: 194). The model outlines five stages of development that "oppressed people may experience as they struggle to understand themselves in terms of their own minority culture, the dominant culture, and the oppressive relationship between the two cultures" (Atkinson et al 1979: 194). Similarly to Cross' 1991 model, the model is presented as a continuous process in which one stage blends into another and boundaries between stages are not clear. In addition, not all minority individuals experience the entire range of these stages in their lifetimes, individuals may repeat stages, and the process may start at any stage.

More clearly than in the preceding models, accompanying each stage are attitudes. Each attitude is a reflection of part of the individual's identity: how s/he views: a) self, b) others of the same minority, c) others of another minority, and d) majority individuals. The following is a description of each stage and the attitudes that accompany each stage.

In stage one, *Conformity*, individuals prefer dominant cultural values over those of their own culture (Atkinson et al. 1979:194). They identify those physical and/or cultural characteristics that indicate their minority status as a “source of pain, and [these] are either viewed with disdain or are repressed from consciousness” (Atkinson 1979: 194). Their views of self, fellow group members, and other minorities are heavily influenced by their identification with the dominant culture (Atkinson et al. 1979: 194).

In stage 2, *Dissonance Stage*, the minority individual encounters information and/or experiences that challenge previously accepted values and beliefs and consequently, the individual is led to question attitudes acquired in the Conformity Stage (Atkinson et al. 1979: 195). This stage is depicted as culturally confusing and conflicted.

In Stage 3, *Resistance and Immersion Stage*, the individual rejects the dominant society and culture and embraces minority-held views. The individual begins to: explore his/her history and culture, identify with his/her minority group and other minority groups, and distrusts the dominant group. An important motivation for the individual’s behavior is the desire to eliminate oppression of the individual’s minority group.

The individual feels discontent and discomfort for holding dominant group views in stage 4, *Introspection Stage*. He/she turns his/her attention away from total group acceptance to his/her individual autonomy. The individual feels conflicted over an allegiance to his/her minority group versus to desires for personal autonomy (Atkinson et al. 1979: 196).

In the last stage, *Synergetic Articulation and Awareness Stage*, the individual comes to understand the value of the ethnic self, the value of other cultures, and the dominant group. The individual exhibits autonomy as s/he has learned to resolve dominant group conflicts and discomforts. An important motivation at this stage is to eliminate all forms of oppression, not just oppression directed towards one’s own group.

The Atkinson et al. model is especially informative because of the detailed description of the attitudes and behaviors accompanying each stage of identity development. The model aids in the study of Chinese identity by detailing how attitudes toward self and others may affect ethnic identity development. It is an elaboration on past models of oppressed groups and is not confined to the description of one ethnicity, or any one form of identity. Like the others, this model demonstrates the progressive nature of identity development. But, unlike the other models, the individual’s view of minority culture, the dominant culture, and the relationship

between the cultures is reflected in each stage and it is these attitudes which shape one's ethnic identity development. Again, we see an advancement of ethnic identity, first, through the rejection of one's own culture and the acceptance of the dominant culture, followed by an encounter which challenges the individual's belief about his/her culture and the dominant culture, leading to the rejection of the dominant group's values and beliefs and the immersion of the individual into his/her cultural heritage, and lastly the individual triumphing with a well balanced, integrated acceptance of his/her ethnic identity in an oppressive society.

Consistent with Atkinson's reasoning, Kim (1981) posits that one of the most critical psychological issues faced by Asian Americans today is *identity conflict*. Identity conflict exists when an individual perceives and rejects simultaneously certain aspects or attributes of him/herself. For Asian Americans, it is the awareness of self as an Asian which one rejects in favor of identification with white symbols and images. The issue here is not the lack of awareness of one's ethnic self but how one feels about and values that aspect of oneself (Kim 1981: 1).

Kim derives from her research an Asian American identity development model based on a sample of Japanese American women. The model postulates that identity is developmental, in the general direction of a

Negative to positive self-concept, from identity conflict over being Asian American to an acceptance and positive identification with Asian Americans, and from ignorance of the political reality of being a racial minority to the realization of the dynamics of oppression and its specific impact on Asian Americans (Kim 1981: 192).

Kim's model identifies five stages of Asian American ethnic identity development:

Ethnic Awareness (EA), White Identification (WI), Awakening to Social Political Consciousness (ATSPC), Redirection to Asian American Consciousness (RTAAC), and Incorporation (I).

Stage 1, *Ethnic Awareness (EA)*, occurs prior to kindergarten or elementary school. In this stage, the individual is aware of her Japanese descent and the attitude towards her ethnicity varies from neutral to positive. The neutral to positive attitude relates to the "exposure and participation in Japanese ethnic activities and subjects' self-concepts and ego identities as a Japanese American" (Kim 1981: 124). However, when the individual enters school and is exposed to an environment that increases her contact with white society, that contact negatively



affects her perception of self. It is the increased contact with whites that leads the individual into the next stage.

Stage 2, *White Identification (WI)*, is a direct consequence of the increase in significant contact between the individual and white society. This stage entails the sense of being different from other people and not belonging anywhere. The individual's self-perception changes from neutral/positive to negative, and she begins to internalize the belief systems of white society. Consequently, the individual does not question what it means to be Asian American. The individual alienates herself from other Asian Americans, while simultaneously experiencing social alienation from her white peers. Only when the individual seeks to "acquire a political understanding of [her] social status" (Kim 1981: 138) does she enter into the next stage.

In Stage 3, *Awakening to Social Political Consciousness (ATSPC)*, the individual acquires a different perspective on who she is in this society: she is a minority in this society, but she is not personally responsible for her situation (Kim 1981: 138-139). How this political consciousness is acquired varies by individual. However, Kim notes that significant changes in perspective occur via involvement in a political movement; as the individual increases her exposure to people who work on social issues, this in turn helps her to shift her self-concept from negative to positive. The range of political involvement varies (reading and taking courses on racism and the Asian American experience, being a member of political discussion groups and women's support groups, attending demonstrations, etc.). Thus, her identity shifts from feeling alienated and inferior to centering on being a minority, being oppressed, not being inferior, and feeling connected to experiences of other minorities.

In stage 4, *Redirection to Asian American Consciousness (RTAAC)*, the individual changes her identification from minority to that of an Asian American. The individual immerses herself into the Asian experience to better understand herself and her people. The form in which this occurs varies from spending a lot of time in the Asian American community to reading about Asian American history and culture (Kim 1981: 147). The goal is to determine what parts of self are Asian and what parts are American. Accompanying this stage are intense negative emotions directed at whites and at racism (Kim 1981: 147). However, with time she learns to acknowledge and deal with racism, and more importantly she learns to feel comfortable and proud to be an Asian American.

Lastly, in stage 5, *Incorporation (I)*, the individual relates to different groups of people without losing her identity as an Asian American (Kim 1981: 152). She realizes that being Asian American is part of her identity and not her only identity. In addition, because she has a strong sense of self, she is not threatened by prevailing white values. Most importantly in this stage, her Asian identity blends in with the rest of her identities.

Kim compares her theoretical model to that of Cross. Similarities between the theories include:

the presence of definable, progressive stages; the general directionality of a negative to positive self-concept; a general orientation from White identification to one's own racial identification; a submersion in the oppressive reality to a liberation from it; a period of immersion in one's own ethnic racial group experience; and the integration of the racial identity with the rest of one's total identity (Kim 1981: 189).

Differences between the two models entail: 1) an "ethnic awareness" among Asian Americans (who are often perceived as immigrants/foreigners) in the first stage of identity development, whereas black Americans (arriving as slaves) develop an ethnic awareness at a later stage (e.g., immersion); and 2) differences in the timing of the recognition of oppression. For Asian Americans in the "Awakening of Social Political Consciousness" stage, "the consciousness of being a member of an oppressed group came before consciousness of being Asian American" (Kim 1981: 191). Whereas for blacks in the "Encounter" stage, "the consciousness of being a member of an oppressed group and Black consciousness seem to have occurred simultaneously" (Kim 1981: 191).

In this model, we see that Asian Americans move through stages to achieve a positive Asian identity. They move from positive to neutral feelings about ethnic self to accepting white views and beliefs about Asians, to involvement and exposure in political movements and ideologies, to identifying as a minority, to identifying as Asian American and immersing themselves in Asian culture, to a positive image and identity about themselves (as an amalgamation of identities).

Like Kim's study, my study specifically examines an Asian-ethnic subgroup of women. Because of the racial-ethnic similarities between our subjects, I should find a greater degree of similarity with her model and findings than with Cross or Gay's models. The combination of

Kim's and my study may create a more generalizable model of ethnic identity development for Asian American women.

#### Dominant group model

Like Gay, Helms modified Cross's model and created a white identity development model. According to Helms (1990), to develop a healthy white identity, one must "accept his or her own whiteness, the cultural implications of being white, and define a view of Self as a racial being that does not depend on the perceived superiority of one racial group over another" (Helms 1990: 49). The achievement of this healthy white identity consists of two processes: the abandonment of racism and the development of a non-racist white identity. Helms posits that to achieve a white racial identity, one advances through six stages: Contact, Disintegration, Reintegration, Pseudo-Independence, Immersion/Emersion, and Autonomy. As in Cross's model, individuals may regress and recycle through stages.

In stage 1, *Contact*, the individual encounters the idea or the actuality of people of color (Helms 1990: 55). However, the individual is unaware that he/she benefits from cultural and institutional racism. Thus, a person may remain in this stage if s/he has limited interaction with people of color. However, if a person interacts with people of color on a continual basis, s/he will eventually recognize and acknowledge that differences exist between the two groups.

In stage 2, *Disintegration*, the individual makes a conscious, though conflicted, acknowledgment of one's Whiteness (Helms 1990: 58). S/he begins to question the moral dilemma that people of color and whites are not really equals. Helms notes that in this stage, when two or more of a person's cognitions are in conflict, "dissonance" results. The individual may try to reduce dissonance in three ways: 1) avoiding contact with people of color, 2) attempting to convince others that people of color are not so inferior, or 3) seeking information from people of color or whites that racism is not the white person's fault or does not really exist (Helms 1990: 59). The avenue for reducing dissonance depends on the extent to which the individual interacts in cross-racial situations. In most cases, the individual removes him/herself from interracial environments. However, some individuals attempt to change their attitudes and beliefs regarding the superiority of their own racial group. The reshaping of their beliefs indicates movement into stage 3.

In stage 3, *Reintegration*, the individual acknowledges a white identity (Helms 1990: 60). S/he accepts the belief that whites are superior to people of color by minimizing and/or denying that there are cross-racial similarities between whites and people of color (Helms 1990: 60). The initial feelings of guilt and anxiety felt in stage 2 are transformed into fear and anger toward people of color. Helms stresses that it is easy to be stuck in this stage, especially if one removes oneself from interracial environments or avoids people of color. However, the individual can move out of this stage through a “personally jarring event . . . [which leads the individual] to abandon this essentially racist identity” (Helms 1990: 60). Once one begins to question his/her definition of whiteness, and the justification of racism, s/he has begun stage 4 (Helms 1990: 61).

In stage 4, *Pseudo-Independent*, the individual begins to redefine a positive white identity by questioning the beliefs that whites are superior to people of color. The individual acknowledges the responsibility of whites for racism and how s/he perpetuates racism (Helms 1990: 61). However, s/he may still unwittingly perpetuate racism (e.g., attempting to change blacks to fit white standards rather than trying to change whites). Also in this stage, the individual looks to people of color rather than to whites to explain racism. S/he may feel uncomfortable around both whites (who have not begun this process) and people of color (who are suspicious of his/her motives). If the individual finds personal rewards to continue the quest for those positive aspects of whiteness that are unrelated to racism, the individual has moved into stage 5 (Helms 1990: 62).

In stage 5, *Immersion/Emersion*, the individual replaces myths and stereotypes about whites and people of color with accurate information about what it means to be white in America (Helms 1990: 62). Changing people of color is no longer the focus, but rather changing white people. The individual desires to learn from biographies and autobiographies of whites who have made similar identity journeys. Lastly, the individual experiences emotional and cognitive restructuring of any past negative feelings.

In the last stage, *Autonomy*, the individual internalizes, nurtures, and applies new definitions of whiteness to self by abandoning cultural, institutional, and personal racism; becomes increasingly aware of other forms of oppression and how they relate to racism; and seeks opportunities to learn from other cultural groups.

Though this theory addresses white identity development, it may be useful in helping understand Chinese American identity. For many Chinese Americans living in predominantly

white environments, stereotypes of Asian Americans as a “model minority,” and the status of Asian Americans (as a group) relative to other people of color, may cause Chinese Americans to perceive themselves as racially superior to other racial minority groups. One such individual may then, according to Helm’s theory, initially accept the benefits of racism, experience dissonance and conflict over racial inequality, renew beliefs in his/her superiority, question Asian superiority and acknowledge the responsibility of benefiting from racism, restructure emotional and cognitive thinking, and lastly internalize and develop a new Asian identity.

The preceding ethnic identity development models account for

[A]n ideological metamorphosis of ethnic identity, perceives this transformation as a dialectical process, assumes that the transformation is a liberating process which symbolizes a psychologically healthier state of being, and uses the idea of developmental stages to account for movement of individuals from negativism to positivism in their self ethnic identities (Gay 1985: 44).

The models contribute to the study of identity in that they establish theoretical questions regarding how ethnic identity is formed and how this formation affects individual and group perceptions and behaviors. These models can be re-examined in a study of Chinese American women for their relevance regarding the presence of definable stages, how attitudes of self and others affect ethnic identity development, how membership in a racial group affects ethnic identity development, and lastly, how one develops and accepts a positive ethnic identity.

I will now provide a brief summary of the five ethnic identity models to demonstrate differences and similarities between models (See Table 1). At first glance, the models appear to have many similarities, yet on a closer comparison, they vary to a great extent. Generally speaking, it appears that following the initial stage of identification with the dominant culture and the experience of one or more encounters, the models diverge in how the individual responds to the encounter(s). To illustrate, individuals immerse themselves into their ethnic history and culture in Cross and Gay’s models; minority individuals choose to reject the dominant society and culture and desire to eliminate oppression of their own group in Atkinson et al.’s model; Japanese women alienate themselves from others in Kim’s model; and lastly, whites accept the idealization of whites and denigration of blacks in Helm’s model. In short, immersion into one’s ethnic heritage and history is not automatically the next step. One may experience alienation or the rejection/idealization of white society and culture. The end products of each model are very similar, but the process itself differs for each model.

**Table 1: Ethnic Identity Development Models**

| <b>Author</b>   | <b>Stage 1</b>                                                                                                                                       | <b>Stage 2</b>                                                                                                                                                                              | <b>Stage 3</b>                                                                                                                               | <b>Stage 4</b>                                                                                                               | <b>Stage 5</b>                                                                                                                            | <b>Stage 6</b>                                                                           |
|-----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Cross</b>    | Pre-Encounter: Identification with white culture; little knowledge of own black culture                                                              | Encounter: Rejects identification with white culture; seeks identification with black culture                                                                                               | Immersion-Emersion: Complete identification with black culture; intense negative feelings towards whites                                     | Internalization: Internalization of black culture; individual standpoint to identification of other oppressed groups         | Internalization-Commitment: Prolongment of Internalization Stage                                                                          |                                                                                          |
| <b>Gay</b>      | Pre-Encounter: 1) Ethnicity not incorporated into one's identification; 2) identification with white culture; little knowledge of own ethnic culture | Encounter: 1) Rethinks existing beliefs about ethnic self and group; 2) Rejection of white culture; immersion into ethnic history and culture; decline in extremist attitudes and behaviors | Post-Encounter: Internalization of ethnic identity; Pride in one's ethnicity; receptivity to other oppressed groups                          |                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                          |
| <b>Atkinson</b> | Conformity: Prefer dominant culture over their own.                                                                                                  | Dissonance: Encounters information or experiences which challenge previous beliefs acquired in previous stage                                                                               | Resistance and Immersion: Endorses minority-held views and rejects dominant society and culture; desire to eliminate oppression of own group | Introspection: Feelings of discomfort with dominant group views; diverts attention to notions of greater individual autonomy | Synergetic Articulation and Awareness: Values ethnic self, other cultures and dominant group; desire to eliminate all forms of oppression |                                                                                          |
| <b>Kim</b>      | Ethnic Awareness: Discovery of ethnic awareness                                                                                                      | White Identification: Realization of differentness; alienation from self and other Asian Americans; social alienation for whites                                                            | Awakening to Social Political Consciousness: Gain new political perspective; identification with minority status                             | Redirection to Asian American Consciousness: Personal and cultural exploration; appreciation of Asian American experience    | Incorporation: Blending of Asian American identity with the rest of individual's identities                                               |                                                                                          |
| <b>Helm</b>     | Contact: Obliviousness to own racial identity; Encounter the idea or actuality of people of color                                                    | Disintegration: Acknowledgment of white identity                                                                                                                                            | Reintegration: Idealization of whites; denigration of blacks                                                                                 | Pseudo-Independent: Intellectualized acceptance of own and others' race; questions racism                                    | Immersion/Emersion: Honest appraisal of racism and significance of whiteness                                                              | Autonomy: Internalizes a multi-cultural identity with non-racist whiteness as one's core |

Other differences among models are found. Most noticeably, we see that Helm's model addresses white identity development. It differs from most other forms of ethnic identity development models because of the racial group that it represents. Since whites compose the dominant group in our society (who hold power, and who manipulate and control oppressive institutions/structures/ideologies of our society), their racial identity is based on perceptions of their own group and the perceived superiority of their group in relation to other groups. It is the acknowledgment of racism and whiteness and the superior notions of whiteness that the individual must first overcome before achieving a non-racist white identity. This differs from the other four models (which discuss ethnic minority identities) in that ethnic minority members initially identify with white culture rather than with their own culture.

We see that Kim's model refers to the acquisition of a political consciousness, which may reflect a reaction to the white political practice of lumping various Asian subgroups into the pan-ethnic label "Asian American." Her model also suggests that rather than establishing a single ethnic identity, the individual learns to blend her Asian American identity with her other identities. In contrast to the other models, Kim acknowledges the existence of multiple identities as making up one's sense of self as opposed to the implied overarching power of an ethnic identity as dictating one's total identity. For the other four models, the end product of one's ethnic identity differs: Cross proposes the achievement of a positive black identity, Gay (and Cross) suggests a bi/multi/globalistic ethnic identity, Atkinson et al. advance the valuing of ethnic self, and Helms submits the creation of a transformed white identity.

Another difference among models is that Atkinson's model explicitly describes attitudes towards self, fellow group members, other minorities, and the dominant group as reflective of one's identity. The other models concentrate more on the individual's emotions as opposed to addressing explicitly attitudes towards others (although because we are discussing ethnic identity development, a sub-field of social psychology, the models inherently include the interplay between the attitudes and behavior of others and self). Atkinson et al.'s model also addresses the desire of the individual to establish an identity as an ethnic group member and an identity as an autonomous individual separate from the minority group.

Although the models exhibit differences, they also have many similarities. We see that the ethnic models contain similar components. A generic ethnic identity development model appears to contain the following elements: Stage 1- Pre-Encounter, individual identity is based

on a lack of knowledge of his/her own ethnic culture; instead the person identifies with the dominant culture. However, Stage 2- Encounter, an encounter or series of encounters triggers the individual to rethink his/her beliefs about his/her ethnic culture and white culture. The individual then explores and immerses him/herself into his/her ethnic culture while rejecting white culture and beliefs (Stage 3- Immersion-Emersion). Lastly, the individual learns to appreciate and find pride in his/her ethnic identity and also strives to identify with other oppressed groups (Stage 4- Internalization).

I intend to draw predominantly from models by Atkinson et al., Helms and Kim. Kim's subjects most closely resemble mine and thus her conclusions should provide a good source for comparisons. Atkinson's Minority Identity Development model is particularly helpful because it emphasizes the influences of self and others on one's identity and attitudes. Though Helm's model focuses on whites, the model is useful for Asian Americans because it accounts for relative racial status and its effects on the formation of ethnic identity. Because of racially perceived differences between Asian Americans and other racial-ethnic minorities, Asian Americans may see themselves as superior to others and thus they may more closely follow Helm's dominant model rather than the models for subordinated groups.

A major criticism of four of the models is their lack of attempt (Gay 1985; Atkinson et al. 1979) or inadequate attempts to define the term "identity." For example, Cross does not explicitly define "identity," but suggests only that black identity reflects one's self-concept. Cross posits that self-concept consists of both a general Personal Identity (PI) and a Reference Group Orientation (RGO). One's PI involves one's self-esteem, self-worth, etc., whereas one's RGO implies belonging to a group and how one evaluates that group. Cross proposes that the PI and RGO components of black self-concept (identity) show positive enhancement across stages of ethnic identity development. Helms defines a racial identity as "a sense of group or collective identity based on one's perception that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a particular racial group" (Helms 1990: 3). Unfortunately, this definition employs the term "identity" and "racial" to define "identity" and "racial," respectively. Kim provides the best attempt at defining identity. Kim stresses that one's identity consists of ego identity and self-concept. Self-concept refers to one's judgments and evaluations of self (attitudes about oneself). Ego-identity concerns meanings an individual attributes to herself (Kim 1981: 6). While both components reflect self-definitions, they are also influenced by the Other.



Another criticism of the models, aside from Kim and Helms, is that the triggers for movement from stage to stage are not specified (other than “encounters”). To fully understand the process of ethnic identity development, we need to explore what causes the transitions from stage to stage. In addition, although the models are presented in a linear manner, some authors note (e.g., Cross, Atkinson et al.) that ethnic identity development is a process and not necessarily an undertaking with definable stages. Thus, another critique of developmental models is that the process of identity formation is potentially much more complex and less straightforward and unidirectional than the models suggest. Lastly, with the exception of Kim, the models do not examine gender differences or consider the fact that multiple identities may complicate ethnic identity formation. Adding to these problems, the empirical evidence (see next section) suggests that these models do not match people’s experiences well, particularly the experiences of Asian Americans or women. Given these issues, a study of Chinese American women’s identity formation seems especially warranted.

#### Empirical Evidence for the Theoretical Re-Evaluation of Ethnic Identity Development Models

This next section further justifies the need to re-assess the utility of Ethnic Identity Development models. First, the empirical literature reviewed here supports the overall conclusion that identity formation is much more complex and situationally contingent than suggested by developmental models. Secondly, studies seem to show that Chinese American (and/or Asian American) evaluations of self/group vary from that of blacks and Hispanics, and thus their identity formations may differ. Lastly, few studies examine gender differences, and when they do, the findings suggest that ethnic identity formation differs for males and females.

Kibria (1997) conducted in-depth interviews with sixty second-generation Chinese Americans and Korean Americans between the ages of twenty-one and forty. The study revealed that many choose to identify as Asian Americans “because of their sense that Asians in the US . . . shared common experiences and worldviews” (i.e., shared background and culture) (Kibria 1997: 524). Favorability toward intra-ethnic marriages stemming from a reaction to “the fundamental racial divisions of US society, in which the possibilities for integration were limited for non-whites” (Kibria 1997: 531) also affected the propensity to identify as Asian American. In addition, in response to US exclusionary practices “was a heightened consciousness of one’s *Asian* racial identity” (Kibria 1997: 531) due to the racial lumping of Asian-origin peoples by the

dominant society. Despite the fact that the respondents emphasized a pan-ethnic identification, clearly ethnic identification was equally salient for them in certain contexts. For most of the respondents, their Chinese or Korean ethnic identity was more important than their Asian American identity. For example, the subjects stressed the importance of marrying an individual of one's same Asian ethnic group in order to maintain "the purity of the family lineage" (Kibria 1997: 530) (preserving a "pure" Chinese or Korean lineage).

Kibria notes that "the effects of racial assignment on identity formation were mediated by the diverse ways in which individuals interpreted the experience of racial labeling" (Kibria 1997: 540). For example, participation in Asian American organizations increased the political nature of an individual's identity as an "Asian American" in contrast to those who did not participate. That is, exposure to race-centered and politicized Asian American organizations affected respondents' interpretations of racial labeling (Kibria 1997: 540)<sup>4</sup>. For others, racial consciousness as an "Asian American" "referred to a collective history of racial oppression shared by Asians in the US . . . [and] to the shared personal racial history of Asian Americans" (Kibria 1997: 533) (e.g., growing up Asian in America). Some subjects referred to experiencing a "white phase"-- wanting to be white-- in response to negative stereotypes and feelings of exclusion (Kibria 1997: 533). This finding coincides with out-group orientations as reflected in empirical studies on black identity conducted between 1939 and 1960. These studies suggested that self-hatred (in which an individual has a negative perception of ethnic group identity and consequently, as a member of such a group, also has a negative perception of self) was a well-documented trend among blacks (Cross 1991: 50).

The respondents also referred to the "immigrant narrative" framework in the "construction of a pan-Asian American history and culture" (Kibria 1997: 535). Two elements of the immigrant narrative were highlighted by the subjects. First, they experienced feelings of "the marginal and 'in-between' position of the second generation" (Kibria 1997: 535). That is, they were raised to be Asian, but they lived in America. The subjects felt that they did not fit in - as teenagers and as members of a racial ethnic group. They believed that "their *Asian* upbringing [was] an important reason for their being different" (Kibria 1997: 536), and consequently, it was their upbringing that shaped their conception of self. For example, many of

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<sup>4</sup> Kibria does not indicate if the participants in Asian American political organizations joined because of political awareness or if they became politically aware after joining. However, regardless of the basis for political awareness, these individuals viewed their lives through a political lens.

the respondents believed that they could not marry a fellow Chinese or Korean because they were raised in the US and were somewhat alienated from the Chinese/ Korean community and culture (Kibria 1997: 536).

A second element of the immigrant narrative entailed the importance of “Asian cultural values and socioeconomic success” (Kibria 1997: 535). Asian values, defined as an emphasis placed on family, education, honesty, hard work and respect for elders, shaped the respondents’ understanding of Asian American culture (Kibria 1997: 537). They believed that their success stemmed from these very values.

Though Kibria’s study does not present evidence for a developmental process of ethnic identity formation, the study sheds light on the formation of an Asian American identity using a micro-level analysis of attitudes and beliefs about one’s position in society and about intermarriage. The research reveals that the subjects recognize the imposition of this label by the dominant group as well as the power inherent in infusing the term “Asian American” with their own meaning. However, it seems that some subjects were unaware that institutionalized racism created their “identity crisis” and not their Asian culture. In other words, they internalized racist beliefs that their culture was different and therefore inferior. Also, many subjects attributed their success to the “model minority” stereotype as created and sustained by “Asian values” found within the home. They failed to recognize that the use of this stereotype by the dominant society was a possible means to blame non-Asian racial minorities for their lack of success. Though Kibria’s study demonstrated reasons for pan-ethnic identification (as well as same-ethnic identification), unfortunately it failed to explore possible gender and class differences.

Yeh and Huang (1996), using the Ethnic Identity Development Exercise (EIDE), questioned 87 Asian American college students about their pan-ethnic identity. The EIDE assesses ethnic identity development by examining the subjects’ descriptions (through writing and drawing) of the process of their development (Yeh and Huang 1996: 653). They concluded that ethnic identity development is not linear in nature, but is dynamic and complex, largely influenced by social context (Yeh and Huang 1996: 654). The subjects described external factors (e.g., relationships and geographic location) as more strongly influencing their identity than internal factors. The subjects also emphasized that “the standards and beliefs of, and their alienation from, the dominant white culture were very strong factors in shaping their ethnic identity” (Yeh and Huang 1996:656). Lastly, shame or the fear of losing face also influenced

ethnic identity development by causing the subjects to conform to “white society” in an attempt to “avoid the embarrassment of being different, or [they] identified with their own culture when it was expected, in order to avoid shame in the family or among other Asians” (Yeh and Huang 1996:656). In short, students did not describe a process of self-denigration followed by an encounter and ethnic immersion in the course of forming their ethnic identities, but rather identification with one or the other of the two cultures depending on context.

Though Yeh and Huang’s study illuminated the complexity and malleability of Asian American ethnic identity and its formation, the study failed to test for gender and class differences. It also ignored Asian ethnic subgroup differences (because of possible historical and contextual differences among groups, there might have been different pathways or outcomes for each group).

Though the studies differ in conceptualizations, research methods, and samples, some themes and conclusions can be drawn from them and related to my study. First, the studies stressed that ethnic identity development is dynamic and complex and not necessarily linear in nature. Ethnic identity is both influenced externally (e.g., by the dominant white culture’s imposition of outside labels and perceptions, geographic location, relationships with others) and internally (through internalizing Asian and Asian American traditions, culture and expectations). One’s Asian American identity can be a product of external labeling, a sense of shared history, a means for political consciousness, or any combination of the above. Ethnic identities are malleable depending upon the social setting and context. For example, one’s Asian American identity may be emphasized in a white setting, whereas one’s Chinese American identity may be more salient when among Asian Americans. This leads us to question the *meaning* of one’s ethnic identity via the viewpoint of the out-group versus the perspective of the in-group. For example, an individual labeled as “Asian” by the dominant group may begin to see him/herself according to the dominant group’s definition of what it means to be “Asian.” Likewise, the manner in which one’s own ethnic group defines “Chinese American” affects the interpretations and responses to this label. Thus, the meaning of one’s ethnic identity can be affected by both the perspectives of the out-group *and* the in-group.

A study by two Dutch scholars more clearly suggests that social context influences how individuals define, perceive, and evaluate their identity. Through questionnaires, Kinket and Verkuyten (1997) examined three levels of ethnic self-identification among 490 Dutch and

Turkish children in eight Dutch cities. The three levels were: 1) *ethnic self-definition* (where one recognizes membership in an ethnic group and uses an accurate label to define the group and oneself); 2) *ethnic self-evaluation* (where group membership is prompted by a need for positive self-esteem as a group member); and 3) *ethnic introjection* (ethnic identity which involves a high level of commitment, emotional involvement and feelings of belonging) (Kinket and Verkuyten 1997: 339-340).

The authors argue that the three levels of identification differ in terms of emotional involvement and commitment. Self-definition represents the least psychologically profound level and Introjection the most profound level of identification (Kinket and Verkuyten 1997: 349). They observed that “the psychologically most profound level of ethnic self-identification was not affected by the immediate context, whereas the least profound level showed the highest dependency on context” (Kinket and Verkuyten 1997:350). They found that the immediate social context (e.g., multicultural education and practices, ethnic composition of the class) were more likely to affect the lower level of psychological involvement than the higher level. For example, the ethnic self-definition and self-evaluation of the children were not affected by class composition. However, when the ethnic-*minority* Turkish children outnumbered the ethnic-*majority* Dutch children, the Turkish children more positively evaluated their ethnic group membership than when the class contained more Dutch children. With regards to gender differences, boys were found to describe themselves more often than girls in ethnic terms and more positively evaluated their ethnic identity than girls (Kinket and Verkuyten 1997:351). The authors speculated that this may be because the boys were more concerned with status and prestige differences which are “related to groups in general and ethnic groups in particular” (Kinket and Verkuyten 1997:351).

The study concludes that we should be sensitive to differences in levels of self-identification and to the immediate social context when examining ethnic identity. Their study also showed that each level of identification varies in the degree of commitment, emotional involvement, and feelings of belonging to an ethnic group and becomes progressively less dependent on social context as the level of identification increases. The authors could be proposing a theory of ethnic identity development or they could simply be specifying forms of ethnic identity (they do not elaborate on which stance they are taking- if they were taking a stance).

This study is included to note, once again, the importance of the relationship between context and degree of ethnic self-identification. Applying Kinket and Verkuyten's results to my study, I may find that at the highest level of identification (ethnic introjection), the respondents should require less social contextual support than those who are at the lowest level of identification (ethnic self-definition).

Interviewing 91 Asian American, black, Hispanic, and white tenth graders, Phinney (1989) employed the use of four scales from the Bronstein-Cruz Child/Adolescent Self-Concept and Adjustment scale and a scale of ego identity. The scales assessed the extent of ethnicity exploration, commitment to an ethnic identity, and attitudes about ethnicity. Based on existing ethnic identity development literature, Phinney advanced her variation of a stage model of ethnic identity development. Phinney's stages included 1) diffuse (little or no exploration of one's ethnicity and no clear understanding of the issues); 2) foreclosed (little or no exploration of ethnicity, but apparent clarity about one's own ethnicity); 3) moratorium (evidence of exploration, accompanied by some confusion about the meaning of one's own ethnicity -- this stage is often precipitated by an "encounter" [Cross 1978] which pushes the individual into an awareness of a new identity); and 4) achieved (evidence of exploration, accompanied with a secure understanding and acceptance of one's own ethnicity (Phinney 1989:38).

Phinney found that for white respondents, ethnicity was not an issue, aside from being simply "American." This may be because ethnicity is an option for white respondents and possibly not of any particular importance in their daily lives (See Waters 1990). Or, this finding may have resulted from employing the term "ethnicity" versus "race" in the study. In other words, ethnicity may not be particularly salient for the white respondents, whereas "race" may be more important. Lastly, the respondents may not view themselves ethnically at all, and consequently, ethnicity is not an issue for them.

Based on their answers to questions regarding ethnic exploration, commitment to ethnic identity and attitudes about ethnicity, Phinney assigned 60 of 64 minority group respondents to one of three stages of ethnic identity: an initial stage of limited ethnicity exploration (*diffusion/foreclosure*), a *moratorium* stage, and an *achieved* ethnic identity (Phinney 1989:38-42). Chi-square analysis showed no significant differences between stage assignment and ethnic group, sex, SES, or school.

In contrast to the previous studies, Phinney's research provides empirical evidence of ethnic identity development stage classification among ethnic minority adolescents. However, her study found "little evidence of the negative attitudes towards one's own group" in the diffusion/foreclosure stage (Phinney 1989:45) or that the moratorium stage was necessarily spurred on by an "encounter" (Phinney 1989:46). Given that the findings differ from the developmental models described earlier, they once again raise questions about developmental models. Interestingly, Phinney found that those subjects with a negative attitude towards their own group were mainly Asian American subjects. She suggested that this may be attributed to the lack of role models or social movements available to Asian Americans as compared to blacks and Mexican Americans. It is possible that this finding relates to feelings of alienation from the dominant society (Kibria 1997; Kim 1981) and the alienation may lead to negative group attitudes.

Few studies actually examine the relationship between ethnic identity and negative self-perception. Contrary to the belief that racial-ethnic minorities internalize the negative views of racial minority groups as held by the dominant group, Phinney finds little evidence that her subjects hold negative attitudes towards their own ethnic group (except among Asian American students) (Phinney 1989:45). She stresses that the "process of ethnic identity development, not minority group membership per se, is a key factor in understanding self-esteem" (Phinney 1989:47). In other words, those adolescents with a clearer understanding of their ethnicity have a higher sense of self-evaluation. Given that only one of the four empirical studies reviewed here discusses the relationship between ethnic identity and self-perception, this illuminates the need to establish that one such relationship exists.

Though Phinney's study does demonstrate evidence of classifiable stages in the development of ethnic identity and the study explored more than one racial ethnic group, it failed to explain what triggered certain students to reach an achieved ethnic identity stage. Phinney should expand on the *process* of ethnic identity development- exactly what was/is the process? *Is* it developmental? Also, the effects of context and structure on ethnic identity need attention, given the findings of Yeh and Huang (1996), Kibria (1997), and Kinket and Verkuyten (1997).

In another study, Phinney and Alipuria (1990) used questionnaires to examine ethnic

identity search and commitment<sup>5</sup>, the degree of importance of ethnic identity, and its relationship to self-esteem among 196 Asian American, black, and Mexican American college students. They found no significant relationship with or interaction between ethnic identity commitment and sex, SES, or ethnic group. The minority group subjects did report that ethnicity was an important aspect of their identity (Phinney and Alipuria 1990: 179), although occupation and sex roles were the most important components of their identity development. There also existed strong positive relationships between self-esteem and ethnic identity search and commitment for blacks and Mexican Americans. That is, those students who had explored and resolved issues regarding their ethnicity had higher self-esteem than those who had not.

Phinney and Alipuria noted that Asian American students displayed the lowest ethnic identity search among the three minority groups and showed the lowest correlation between search score and self-esteem. It may be that the Asian American students have the lowest ethnic identity search scores<sup>6</sup> and show the lowest correlation between search scores and self-esteem because they were in California where ethnic identity may be less of an issue (due to larger numbers of Asian Americans in the population). Alternatively, subjects may have possessed greater resources and abilities to reject the dominant group's label of Asian American.

This study does not focus on ethnic identity development, but the importance of ethnicity as a component of one's identity. Phinney and Alipuria conclude that rather than focus on the relationship between ethnic group *membership* and self-esteem, one should examine the relationship between *identity search/commitment* and self-esteem to better understand issues regarding one's ethnicity (Phinney and Alipuria 1990:181). That is, to better understand a person's level of self-esteem, one should focus less on perceptions of group membership and more on how that person thinks about ethnicity. Thus, my study will need to explore both the effects of group membership perceptions *and* identity search/commitment on self-esteem. Similar to Phinney's 1989 study, this study does not take into account the effects of context and structure on ethnic identity formation.

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<sup>5</sup> Ethnic identity search refers to the need to discover one's ethnic background and the role it plays in one's life (Phinney 1990: 180). Ethnic identity commitment concerns the exploration into ethnicity and commitment to that ethnic identity.

<sup>6</sup> The search scores were composed of 6 items on which the subjects were asked to rate themselves on a 4 point scale as to how similar or different they were from people who had experienced ethnic identity search (Phinney and Alipuria 1990: 175).



In the last empirical study to be reviewed in this section, Kim (1981) interviewed eight third-generation Japanese American women who were divided into two groups: those who grew up in predominantly white neighborhoods and those who did not. As mentioned earlier, she posits that “one of the most critical psychological issues faced by Asian Americans today is *identity conflict*” (Kim 1981: 1). Identity conflict, which is a direct result of living in a racist society, exists “when an individual perceives certain aspects or attributes of him/herself which s/he rejects simultaneously” (Kim 1981: 1). For Asian Americans, identity conflict may manifest itself in a “belief of one’s own inferiority and those of other Asian Americans, deep seated feelings of self-hatred, and alienation from his/her racial-self, from other Asian Americans, and/or the society at large” (Kim 1981: 1). Kim suggests that such feelings lend themselves to the development of negative self-concepts and low self-esteem (Kim 1981: 1).

Based on her interviews, Kim concludes that Japanese American females move through sequential, progressive, and discernible stages to achieve a positive Asian American identity. They shift from accepting white views and beliefs about Asians, to recognizing racism, to involvement and exposure to political movements and ideologies, to rejecting white ideologies and belief systems, to immersing themselves in Asian culture, resulting in a positive ethnic identity for themselves and positive views about Asian culture. Thus, she argues that movement through a progression of stages can lead an individual to develop a positive ethnic identity, and she provided factors that facilitate movement from stage to stage. She suggests that information, support systems, and interaction with the social environment (Kim 1981: viii) facilitate the movement from one stage to another. Based on Kim’s study, I can explore the presence of discernible stages and the factors affecting the movement between stages. A critique of Kim’s study is, of course, her small sample size (although she conducted in-depth interviews).

The review of these theories and empirical studies on ethnic and pan-ethnic identity demonstrates the wide range of approaches to and findings when studying identity. This review emphasizes the cognitive and structural aspects of ethnicity, and the contextual and dynamic nature of ethnic and pan-ethnic formation. The studies suggest that Asian Americans tend to experience feelings of alienation and exclusion (Kibria 1997; Yeh and Huang 1996), such that they express negative attitudes towards their own group (Phinney 1989) and display low degrees of ethnic exploration (Phinney and Alipuria 1990). My study will seek to establish if such experiences often exist among my respondents.

In addition, the studies stress that ethnic identity is influenced by the dominant group's imposition of its labels and perceptions (Kibria 1997; Kim 1981; Yeh and Huang 1996) and by internal factors, such as relationships with others and feelings of a shared history and experience (Kibria 1997; Kim 1981; Kinket and Verkuyten 1997; Yeh and Huang 1996). My study will include the influence of external and internal factors.

Two studies examine the progressive nature of ethnic identity development. Phinney (1989) and Kim (1981) establish that stages do exist but only Kim proposes factors that foster movement between stages. Because my study explores the development of racial-ethnic identity, it will look for the existence of stages and bases for stage progression.

Overall, most studies neglected to inquire into gender differences. The other studies showed mixed results: Kinket and Verkuyten (1997) found that boys more positively evaluate their ethnic identity than girls, while both of Phinney's studies (1989 & 1990) found no sex differences in the formation of an ethnic identity.

In sum, empirical studies of ethnic identity stress the complexity of ethnic identity formation in ways not emphasized by developmental models and raise additional concerns for the examination of ethnic identity. These studies point to problems with developmental models, as well as to alternative aspects of identity. The empirical studies suggest that stage models can be improved and that ethnic identity formation is not necessarily unidirectional for everyone. We now turn to sociological and psychological approaches to identity to provide a broader conception and understanding of identity formation. These theories may supplement the findings of the empirical studies and may help to address some of the limitations of ethnic identity development models.

### Sociological Approaches to Identity

Similar to racial/ethnic identity theories, sociological approaches to social identities examine social identity on a micro-level. Individual-level identities are defined as "identifications of the self as a certain kind of person, using broad social categories to describe 'who I am'" (Thoits and Virshup 1997: 106). George McCall and J. L. Simmons' (1963) Role-Identity theory and Stryker's (1982) Identity theory are two well-known sociological approaches to identity. Both theories utilize a symbolic interactionist approach to define social identity.

## McCall and Simmons' Role-Identity Model

According to McCall and Simmons (1966), individuals are able to interact with one another because interaction is based on identification (categorizing or naming things) and the meanings attached to that identification. With regards to people, we identify persons in terms of their *social positions* (e.g., student, wife, violinist). Through this identification process, we modify our conduct towards one another based on the social positions that each holds and the accompanying set of expectations attached to each position. That set of expectations is known as the *social role* associated with that position. Thus, social roles serve as a template for behavior when we interact with others.

How we decide to behave in certain situations varies with our role-identity. Role-identity is defined as “the character and the role that an individual devises for [him/herself] as an occupant of a particular social position” (McCall and Simmons 1966: 67). It is the view that one has for oneself, as one imagines how others would view him/her in that role. In other words, one’s identity is based on the imagined reactions of others. Thus, how we behave depends on how we think others perceive us and they typically perceive us as holding one or more roles. Role-identities give “meaning to our daily routine, for they largely determine our interpretations of the situations, events, and other people we encounter” (McCall and Simmons 1966: 69-70). In addition, though the individual may imagine him/herself as occupying a particular social role, the role must be performed and legitimated in one’s own eyes and in the eyes of others for it to be claimed.

Role-identities are organized into a collective whole. According to McCall and Simmons, the organization of role-identities is based on a *prominence hierarchy*. The prominence or importance of an identity depends on the degree to which a) one values one’s view of self as an occupant of the given position, b) one’s view of self has been supported by significant others, c) one has committed oneself to the particular contents of this role-identity, d) extrinsic and intrinsic rewards are obtained from playing a particular role, and e) perceived opportunities are gained from the performance (McCall and Simmons 1966: 77-78).

From McCall and Simmons’ role-identity model, we find that individual identity is an interactive process of role-identification and role-playing. How we perceive ourselves and the manner in which we behave depends greatly on how we perceive others to perceive us. Because we rely on others’ perception of us, our identity is shaped by them. The identity that we chose to

enact varies by situation, depending on who we encounter, extrinsic and intrinsic rewards, and perceived opportunities. Thus, according to McCall and Simmons, without others, we would not have social positions to hold or social roles to perform. Therefore, we would not have social identities.

McCall and Simmons emphasize the intricacies of interaction determining identity. They believe that we identify and react to persons in terms of their social positions. Our identity derives from the roles we play based on our social positions and the perceived social positions of others. In contrast, ethnic identity development models do not explicitly discuss the interaction (of role-identification and role-playing) between individuals and the dominant group or with members of one's minority group (although implicit in developmental models is the notion that the minority group member holds a negative perception of self and group because s/he identifies with and is influenced by the dominant group).

Applying role-identity theory as a theoretical explanation for racial-ethnic identity formation, racial-ethnic identity is derived from interaction with other people. For example, we categorize one another in terms of race or ethnicity. Through this identification process, we modify our conduct towards one another based on our own and the others' race and ethnicity (e.g., interaction between whites and Chinese Americans likely differs from interaction among whites). Thus, the identification of an individual's social position (Chinese American) dictates his/her social role (Chinese American behavior), what others expect, and how others would respond to the individual. Moreover, because we see ourselves (know ourselves) through others' eyes, we come to define ourselves in terms of our race/ethnicity.

In addition, the enactment of a particular role-identity (e.g. Asian American versus Chinese American) will depend on its location in a salience hierarchy. In contrast to a prominence hierarchy (where role-identities are ranked according to their importance to the self), a salience hierarchy is situational; role-identities are ranked by their likelihood of being enacted under particular circumstances (McCall and Simmons 1966). Therefore, racial-ethnic identity may be salient in some situations and not salient in others. In contrast, according to ethnic identity development models, ethnic identity is a given. Ethnicity does not represent necessarily a role to be played by choice or depending on the situation. Therefore, it will always maintain saliency (once it is acknowledged and the individual begins the process of ethnic identity development). Though ethnic identity salience may waiver depending on the situation

(especially for those in the early stages of development), as the individual advances through the stages, his/her racial-ethnic awareness gains prominence in the shaping of interactions and experiences.

McCall and Simmons provide an intricate explanation for how identity and interaction are intertwined and mutually reinforce one another. According to the authors, identity depends very much on what and how the other interprets and reacts to one's role performances. However, the effects of structure are not accounted for in influencing identity in their approach. Without examining how structure affects the individual, we neglect to account for external influences that affect interaction(s). Structural factors would seem to play a large role in determining an individual's social position and social and personal identity. Given this lack of attention to structure, we now turn to Stryker's identity theory which accounts for its influence on identity formation.

### Stryker's Identity Theory

Like McCall and Simmons, Stryker and Serpe (1982) base their identity theory upon the concepts of symbolic interactionism (developed initially by Mead). They introduce identity theory as reflecting the "root idea of symbolic interactionism: the reciprocity of society and self" (Stryker and Serpe 1982: 205). Mead (1934) argued that through interaction with others we come to know ourselves. As we "become objects to ourselves by attaching to ourselves symbols that emerge from our interaction with others" (Stryker and Serpe 1982: 202), symbols gain meaning from that interaction. Through these symbols, we learn how to behave and how others expect us to behave. In addition, because individuals make up society, interactions with others occur in organized systems of activities. Thus, "as society shapes the self, so the self shapes society" (Stryker and Serpe 1982: 202).

Stryker's theory builds upon the concepts of identity, identity salience, and commitment. According to Stryker and Serpe, an individual has many identities based on the number of positions s/he occupies in an organized structure of social relationships and the social roles attached to these positions. These identities are cognitions about the self in these positions.

Identity salience refers to the ways that identities are organized into a salience hierarchy. The hierarchy is arranged according to the probability of any one identity being invoked in particular situations (much like McCall and Simmon's concept of salience hierarchy).

Commitment concerns “the degree to which the person’s relationships to specified sets of others depends on his or her being a particular [type of] person” (Stryker and Serpe 1982: 207). In other words, an individual’s participation in various social networks and the importance to him/her of the people in various networks affect the salience of an identity and the behavior associated with that identity. Thus, commitment establishes a structural tie to identity in that our placement in the social structure affects who we come in contact with and the identities that are invoked.

In sum, social roles are attached to the social positions that individuals occupy, and individuals exhibit behavior corresponding to those social positions (those roles/positions become identities and ways of defining the self). Identities are organized in a hierarchical fashion by their salience and are situationally invoked. Lastly, commitment to an identity is due to social structure. Here, social structures “limit or constrain choices- who is brought into contact, what possible role relationships can emerge, what resources can be used in these relationships, etc.” (Stryker and Serpe 1982: 208). Identity theory stresses social structure as determining social behavior by affecting relationships in which we are involved and which become self-defining. Therefore, to understand identity formation, we must look at the social structure, according to Stryker.

Stryker’s identity theory stresses social structure as determining social behavior. Because individuals compose social structures, the social positions (e.g., roles and statuses) they occupy in the social structure constrain and affect their behaviors. According to ethnic identity development theories, a hierarchy of social groups must be present because racial-ethnic individuals initially identify with the dominant group and not their own racial-ethnic. Because such social group hierarchy exists, ideology and social structure must be invoking and perpetuating social group stratification. Consequently, from an identity theory point of view, without the social structures perpetuating the existence of dominant and subordinate groups and culture, one’s racial-ethnic identity would not be threatened or devalued.

Symbolic interactionist approaches to identity formation suggest that ethnicity will be salient only in some situations and among certain individuals. This situationality of ethnicity is not indicated as strongly in ethnic identity development models. Developmental models imply that one will develop a racial-ethnic identity over time and that it will remain salient. A critique of these models is that ethnicity may be much more situational. Depending on the context, one

may choose to enact a particular identity or not. For example, an individual may choose to identify and behave as Asian American among whites or Chinese American among Asian Americans. In addition, the social structure affects who we are involved with and consequently the content of our role and ethnic identities. Again, the salience of an identity depends on the situation because participation in various social networks affects who we come into contact with and which identities we invoke.

Comparisons between ethnic identity development models and sociological approaches to identity demonstrate the usefulness and relevance of the latter approach for examining Chinese American identity formation. Sociological approaches to identity stress the importance of social roles and social positions in the process of identity formation and the effects of group hierarchy on identity. Because these theories focus on social perceptions of self, the interactions between self and other, and the effects of the social structure on identity, they may help to explain why ethnic minorities initially believe in the negative perceptions of self and group. Sociological approaches also offer an alternative conception to developmental models: ethnic identity formation and enactment may depend on social networks and social contexts, rather than an internally unfolding understanding of self. Lastly, sociological theories may help to explain why “encounters” in developmental models cause an individual to rethink pre-existing beliefs about self. It may be that the interaction(s) between self and others, an “encounter(s),” propels the minority member to re-evaluate dominant group perceptions of his/her group, according to developmental models. In short, sociological theories may present supplemental explanations for ethnic identity formation and enhance ethnic identity developmental models.

### Psychological Approaches to Identity

In contrast to sociological approaches, psychological approaches to social identities examine identity on a collective level. Collective-level identities are “identifications of the self with a group as a whole, using broad social categories to describe ‘who we are’” (Thoits and Virshup 1997: 106). Tajfel’s Social Identity theory (1978) and Turner’s Self-Categorization theory (1994) use the collective-level approach to help explain the formation of identity.

### Tajfel's Social Identity Theory (inter-group relations)

According to Tajfel (1978), social identity is defined as “that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (Tajfel 1978: 63). Because an individual is a member of a social group (or groups), s/he will view her/himself in relation to that membership and how her/his group stands relative to other groups. Individuals consolidate into groups when there are perceived commonalities among individuals. A cause and a consequence of this type of grouping is that comparisons are made between and among groups. Tajfel believes that it is the “comparative perspective which links social categorizing with social identity” (Tajfel 1978: 64); once the individual perceives that s/he is a member of a group, s/he derives a positive (or negative) social identity from membership by comparing her/his group to other groups. Therefore, the salience of an identity varies with group membership and by situational context.

The recognition of social identity affects group membership in many ways. For example, an individual will remain a member of a group and seek new memberships in new groups if these groups contribute to some positive aspects of his/her social identity. If a group is socially devalued and does not contribute positive aspects to one’s social identity, an individual will leave the group (unless it is impossible to leave the group or it conflicts with attributes that the individual highly values as integral to his/her identity). If the individual cannot leave the group, s/he will either emphasize the undervalued positive attributes of the group or engage in social action to change the group’s unacceptable situation or image to one that is acceptable.

Social Identity theory reflects group identities which are “collective-level self conceptions; they are identifications of the self with a collectivity, claimed and enacted with or for other members” (Thoits and Virshup 1997: 115). It is the comparison of the relative value of one’s group to another group that allows an individual to garner positive or negative values of the self. In three developmental models described earlier (Cross, Kim, and Atkinson), individuals derive a social identity through collective-level identification. Though the individual initially identifies with white culture, following an encounter or series of encounters, the individual realizes that differences exist between self and other. Consequently, s/he rejects identification with white culture and seeks identification with her own group. For example, she perceives a common fate (of oppression) as compared to other groups (e.g., Chinese Americans



perceive that they have similar experiences of different-ness, compared to the experiences of whites). Thus, though s/he initially valued the dominant group and culture and attempted to gain membership in their group, s/he seeks new membership via her own ethnic group due to perceived differences between groups and because this new group membership provides positive aspects to her identity. Through this new group membership, the individual gains a new social identity. In short, Social Identity theory provides a theoretical explanation for why individuals seek ethnic group membership in place of dominant group membership, and how they develop a positive ethnic identity through inter-group comparisons.

Tajfel argues that one derives his/her social identity through making group comparisons. Likewise, Turner (1994) also suggests that one attains his/her social identity through group contrasts and similarities. We now turn to Turner's Social Categorization theory.

#### Turner's Self Categorization Theory (intra-group relations)

Turner (1994) suggests that social identity is "when we think of and perceive of ourselves as 'we' and 'us' (social identity) as opposed to 'I' and 'me' (personal identity)... in which the self is defined in terms of others outside the individual person doing the experiencing" (Turner et al. 1994: 454). In other words, the "self is defined and experienced as identical, equivalent, or similar to a social class of people in contrast to some other class. The self can be defined and experienced *subjectively* as a social collectivity" (Turner et al. 1994: 454-455). Turner stresses that self-categorization is fluid and varies by social context. Self-categorization occurs when one perceives self in relation to others and thus varies according to who the Other is. For example, if the social context changes, it is possible for previously classified "them" individuals to become part of "us." Therefore, how the self is defined varies by the situation and the comparison group at hand.

The theory proposes that as the individual shifts (cognitively) into a shared identity with group members, his/her individual self-perception becomes "depersonalized." The individual will define him/herself less as an individual, unique person and more as a representative of a group. Whether or not an individual will define him/herself in a social or personal identity way depends upon the "'readiness' of a perceiver to use a particular self-category (its relative accessibility) and the 'fit' between category specifications and the stimulus reality to be represented" (Turner et al 1994: 455). *Relative accessibility* reflects the readiness of an

individual to use a particular category to define him/herself based on his/her past and present experiences. Fit is composed of two parts: comparative fit and normative fit. *Comparative fit* represents the process where an individual contrasts self against others to determine if a social category fits. *Normative fit* refers to the matching of self with stereotypical notions of a group and assessing whether one fits those stereotypes. Self-categorization theory “always reflects an interaction between comparative and normative fit, and between fit and accessibility” (Turner et al. 1994: 456). For example, whether or not an individual defines herself as an Asian American female depends upon the interaction between her “readiness” to use a particular self-category (its relative accessibility) and perceived “fit” (comparative and normative). In the case of *relative accessibility* of a category, the individual selects the category Asian American (versus, for example, Chinese American) because her past experiences, present expectations, etc. indicate that this category is most applicable. Her *comparative fit* could include contrasting her identity as female versus male. Lastly, her *normative fit* refers to matching stereotypical notions of the Asian American female (e.g., quiet, subservient) with herself.

In sum, self categorization theory suggests that self-categories are fluid and vary by social context. Self-categories represent social definitions of an individual “in terms of social relations of similarities and differences to others in a social context” (Turner et al. 1994: 458). Most importantly, people appraise themselves in comparison to others, not in terms of how others perceive them (as in symbolic interactionist identity theories). Thus, the self (as part of a collective group) defines itself in relation to others in his/her group.

The cognitive process of depersonalization described by Turner is evident (but not detailed) in three ethnic identity development models (Cross- stage 4; Kim- stage 4; Atkinson- stage 3). In these three models, the individual views the self as part of a group (one’s own ethnic group or as a member of oppressed groups in general). Self Categorization theory may be reflected in some stages of ethnic identity development models in that for an individual to view herself as a part of an ethnic group, the following occurs: 1) a group is *relatively accessible*, (she can easily select the category “ethnic minority” to define herself), and 2) she experiences *comparative fit* (she contrasts herself with other ethnic members), and *normative fit* (she matches stereotypical notions of the group to herself). A portion of ethnic identity development models could be explained or elaborated by the process of self-categorization.

However, some ethnic models suggest that individuals will not always perceive themselves through their group. For example, in Kim's model, the individual also realizes that being Asian American is not her only identity. We infer that her identity is not solely derived from her Asian American group membership. Likewise, Atkinson's model suggests that an individual will eventually question his/her identification with and commitment to his/her ethnic group and feel that the group has taken over his/her individuality.

Though ethnic identity developmental models suggest that an individual's perception can become depersonalized, his/her identity will not remain so. It appears that one's self-perception can change because there is "freedom" of choice of identity; the individual can "flow" in and out of groups (and in and out of individual and collective identifications) as the social context changes.

Like the comparisons of sociological and ethnic identity theories above, the comparisons of psychological approaches to ethnic identity development models demonstrates their value for examining Chinese American identity formation. For example, group comparisons (inter-group and intra-group) help to explain changes in group identification (e.g., white-identified to Asian-identified, Asian American-identified to Chinese American-identified). Also, they illuminate how one may establish a positive ethnic identification through group comparisons as well as by a shared group identity. And once again, these theories offer an alternative to developmental models, given their emphasis on the changing and contextual nature of inter- and intra- group comparisons. Like sociological theories of identity, psychological theories suggest that identity formation is not necessarily an unfolding progression of stages, but may be dependent upon the social context.

### Commenting on the Theories

Given the overview of the various approaches to identity, it is evident that Ethnic Identity Development Models and broader social-psychological approaches to identity may be applicable to the study of Chinese American female identity formation: ethnic identity formation models focus on power dynamics affecting the psychological stages associated with ethnic identity change; other social psychological approaches stress individual- and collective-level identities and the situational contexts that make them salient. However, it is also evident that because the theories approach identity from different perspectives, a more comprehensive model can be

developed that may more fully account for the various constructions of racial-ethnic identity. More specifically, specific social psychological explanations of identity formation can be applied to stages within ethnic identity development models. For simplicity's sake, I will describe a generic, condensed model of ethnic identity development to integrate all three theoretical frameworks.

In stage 1, individual identity is based on a lack of knowledge of one's own ethnic culture and identification with the dominant culture. Stryker's Identity theory can be applied at this stage to help explain why the individual behaves in this manner. It is important to first explain that social structure, in large part, dictates social group organization and hierarchical arrangement. Group stratification dictates that some groups are valued over others and because individuals compose groups, some individuals are valued over other individuals. According to Stryker, differences in social position affect who we come in contact with, how we behave, and the identities invoked. Therefore, in stage 1, because structure directs to a large degree the individual's (conscious or unconscious) preference for the dominant group and lack of desire to identify with the subordinate ethnic group, the individual identifies with the dominant group (and will attempt to behave accordingly).

In stages 2 and 3, an encounter or number of encounters (with others, information, etc.) causes the individual to rethink her beliefs regarding her ethnic culture and white culture, resulting in the individual immersing herself in her ethnic culture. Tajfel's Social Identity theory can be applied to these stages. Though the individual initially identified with the dominant group, she eventually sought new group identification because individuals seek others with whom they perceive a common fate, as compared to other groups. Thus, individuals perceiving similar experiences of ethnic difference or oppression will coalesce into a group; when this group compares itself to the dominant group, the individual will derive a racial-ethnic identity. Alternatively, once an individual is defined as an outsider, she may seek to leave her devalued group and attempt to join the dominant group. However, she may find the dominant group impermeable. Therefore, she uses other collective strategies: emphasizing or adding to the positive features of her own group or confronting the dominant group with its injustice.

Turner's Self Categorization theory is applicable in stage 4. The individual begins to define herself less as an individual and more as a representative of a group. She strives to connect to others in her ethnic group and to other oppressed groups. Through relative

accessibility (readiness to categorize herself as an ethnic minority), comparative fit (contrasting herself with other ethnic minorities) and normative fit (matching stereotypical notions of her group with herself), she defines herself in relation to others in her ethnic group.

A key difference between developmental theories and other social-psychological theories of identity lies in the assumption of the developmental models that the process of identification appears to unfold in a series of steps from identification with the dominant group to identification with one's own group. Broader social-psychological approaches do not assume a negative to positive advancement of identity. It would seem that through the application of specific social psychological approaches to various stages of ethnic identity development models, a more comprehensive and informative theory of ethnic identity development may be advanced.

Alternatively, each of the three theoretical approaches may be reflected in or applied to the experiences of some Chinese American women but not others. Empirical literature provides evidence that while some women may follow the developmental path, the ethnic identity formation of others may involve a less sequential or internal process. For example, the presence of broader social-psychological factors are evident in Kibria's 1997 study. McCall and Simmons argue that one's identity is based on how others perceive him/her. Kibria found that the dominant group's labeling of others as "Asian American" shaped their (Asian American) racial-ethnic identity. Kibria's respondents reacted to the dominant society's perception of their different-ness and adopted the external label (Kibria 1997: 531). Stryker's theory may also apply to the finding because, according to Stryker, the social structure determines the relationships in which an individual is involved, which in turn affect the identities and behaviors s/he invokes. The salience of an Asian American identity is evoked when the subject comes into contact with whites and suffers from alienation and negative stereotyping (Kibria 1997: 533). Although Kibria's respondents identified as Asian American, the situational context affected the salience of other identities so that they also identified mono-ethnically. This may reflect McCall and Simmon's salience hierarchy and Stryker's identity salience (role identities are hierarchical and are situationally contingent). Psychological approaches are also evident in Kibria's study: Tajfel argues that one's social identity derives from a perceived group membership and the comparisons made between his/her group and another group. Kibria's respondents identified as Asian American due to a sense of shared history, experience and culture (Kibria 1997: 533).

One can speculate that the respondent's ethnic identity stemmed from a perceived group membership with others of a similar Asian background in contrast to other Asian and non-Asian groups. Lastly, Turner's theory may also be operating: self-categorization occurs when one perceives self in relation to others within his/her own group. Kibria found that the respondents identified as Chinese/Korean/Asian American when they reflected upon their unique "Chinese/Korean/Asian" upbringing (Kibria 1997:536-537). Kibria's study demonstrates yet again, that ethnic identity is not necessarily linear in nature and can manifest itself in a number of different processes, as suggested by broader social-psychological approaches. The review of the various approaches to identity formation stresses the importance of assessing the presence and utility of each theory as they apply to the Chinese American female experience.

#### Historical Context of the Study: Chinese in America

If a shared history and ethnic stereotypes play important roles in identity, what are the images of Chinese Americans, and of Chinese American women in particular? This section describes the unique historical circumstances surrounding the Chinese American experience, especially for Chinese American women. In particular, the reader is provided a description of their socioeconomic and political location in America. In addition, an analysis of the historically driven development of present-day perceptions of Asian Americans is also described. The purpose of this section is to acquaint the reader with the historical background of Chinese Americans to explain their present-day situations. The historical background of Chinese American women is especially emphasized to help describe the development of stereotypes and how they influence the perceptions, experiences and identities of Chinese American women today. The material is presented to further expand on the complex issues Chinese American women deal with in negotiating their ethnic (and gender) identities.

#### The Chinese History and Experience in America

In the first wave of Chinese immigrants in the mid-19th century, the number of Chinese women who immigrated was minute. This pre-dominantly male wave of immigrants was pushed out of China by poverty and hunger, high taxes, Opium wars (1839-1842; 1856-1860), and peasant Rebellions (Taiping Rebellion [1850-1864]; Red Turban [1854-1864]). In addition,

images of America as the land of opportunities and wealth, and the news of the gold rush, drew many men to America.

Although more than half of the men were married, most women did not accompany their men overseas. Chinese culture and tradition restricted migration for women<sup>7</sup>. Confucian ideology dictated the place of a Chinese woman: “to obey her father as a daughter, her husband as a wife, and her eldest son as a widow” (Takaki 1989: 36).

Chinese women also remained in China because it was costly to travel with their husbands and because of harsh living conditions in America. Moreover, immigrant men’s families forced wives to remain in China to ensure that the men would return home and not settle in America. In short, Chinese women were bound to homeland and family.

In the private sphere, although marriages for both men and women were arranged, “men, but not women, were permitted to commit adultery, divorce, remarry, practice polygamy, and discipline their spouses as they saw fit” (Yung 1995: 19). In fact, the exploitative and expendable status of women encouraged Chinese widows to commit suicide following a husband’s death (Fujitomi and Wong 1976: 238; Ling 1990: 4). In addition, women were unable to participate in politics or public activities-- their place was in the home. In fact, among upper-class women (of particular Chinese ethnic groups), the practice of footbinding further ensured that they would not roam (Takaki 1989: 37; Yung 1995: 19). Thus, while men were abroad, women stayed at home with the children and their in-laws (Takaki 1989: 36; Yung 1995: 20).

Chinese immigrants entered into America as a reserve force of low-wage laborers. Though they were initially welcomed because they met capitalist demands for cheap labor, the immigrants were soon perceived as an economic threat by white working-class workers and politicians. In time, they experienced “anti-Chinese prejudice, discriminatory laws<sup>8</sup>, and outright violence [to ensure] that the Chinese remained subordinated to the dominant white society and that they did not bring their women and families to settle in America” (Yung 1995: 21). Laws were passed that “denied Chinese basic civil rights, such as the right to immigrate, give testimony in court, be employed in public works, intermarry with whites and own land” (Yung 1995: 22). The social, legal, and economic conditions of the time led whites to perceive Chinese immigrants as savage, unassimilable heathens. White society allocated them to the lowest-

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<sup>7</sup> The experiences discussed here refer to migration to the mainland United States and not to Hawaii.

<sup>8</sup> For example, the 1790 Naturalization Law prohibited the naturalized citizenship of non-white immigrants (Takaki 1989: 82).

paying and least desirable jobs (Wang 1991: 193). Eventually, due to racial discrimination in the labor market, the immigrants began to work as shopkeepers, merchants, and small businessmen (Takaki 1989: 13) catering to other Chinese and were inevitably segregated and isolated into Chinatowns.

In 1882, Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act which arrested the immigration of Chinese laborers into America until 1943. It was the first Act in American history to exclude a group of people based specifically on race and class; only officials, students, teachers, merchants, and travelers, as well as a small number of Chinese wives and daughters were exempt from the Act. In addition, even merchant wives and daughters found difficulty entering into America due to the Page Law of 1875 (which prohibited the entry of Chinese female prostitutes). U.S. officials argued that “every Chinese woman was seeking admission on false pretenses and that each was a potential prostitute until proven otherwise” (Yung 1995: 23-24). Under these conditions, Chinese women suffered humiliation, legal expenses, and the risk of deportation (Chan 1991; Yung 1995: 24).

#### History and Experiences of Chinese Women in America

As mentioned above, during the mid-19th century, the first wave of Chinese immigrants to the mainland included a minute number of Chinese women. This was due, in part, to Chinese culture and tradition which restricted the migration of women, as well as to U.S. laws which severely restricted (prohibited) the immigration of most Chinese women (Page Law of 1875; 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act). The major objective of such 19th century discriminatory legislative acts was to avoid and discourage the emergence and subsequent growth of a permanent Chinese American population. In effect, for the most part, the Chinese in America constituted and remained a bachelor society until the mid-1940s. However, the small number of Chinese women in America mainly constituted three groups of subordinated women: prostitutes, *mui tsai* (young domestic servants), and merchant wives.

Chinese prostitutes were mostly “imported as unfree labor, indentured or enslaved. Most were kidnapped, lured, or purchased from poor parents by procurers in China . . . and then resold in America” (Yung 1995: 27). These prostitutes were either sold to wealthy Chinese, to parlor houses, or confined in cribs<sup>9</sup>. Consequently, they served different clientele and lived in varying

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<sup>9</sup> Cribs refer to small rooms or cubicles predominantly used by the “lowest-grade prostitutes” (Yung 1986: 18).



degrees of “comfort.” In the first group, the women served as concubines or mistresses in comfortable quarters. In parlor houses, courtesans and “sing-sing girls” lived in plush living quarters serving well-to-do Chinese or white “gentlemen.” Women confined to cribs served laborers and racially mixed, poorer clientele in sparsely furnished shacks (Yung 1995: 29; Yung 1986: 18).

Chinese prostitutes were valued as property, without political or legal rights. Consequently, their opportunities for protection and freedom were severely limited. In addition, because they lived in America, they suffered racism and the absence of family support (Yung 1995: 31; Yung 1986: 8). The lives of these mainland U.S. women remained desolate (relative to Chinese immigrant women in Hawaii).

The high percentage of Chinese prostitutes among women reflected race, class, and gender dynamics: the race-class dynamic expressed itself in capitalists’ demands for temporary and migratory laborers which, in combination with restrictive laws, created a population of Chinese males without their female counterparts (Chinese male/white female contact was severely discouraged and eventually legally prohibited). The race-gender interaction reflected the Chinese traditional and cultural restriction on women’s migration which contributed to the skewed male-to-female ratio. Both dynamics created an environment in which heterosexual Chinese men turned to prostitutes to fulfill their sexual needs. The gender-class interaction reflected the victimization of poor Chinese females by an “exploitative labor system controlled by unscrupulous men denied gainful employment in the larger labor market” (Yung 1995: 29). In other words, because of a segregated labor market denying Chinese men the opportunities for productive employment, some men turned to the sexual exploitation of women as a means for their economic survival.

*Mui tsai* were young girls brought from China to serve as domestic servants in wealthy Chinese homes or in brothels. The *mui tsai* system, a “cultural carryover from China, was generally regarded by the Chinese as a form of charity for impoverished girls” (Yung 1995: 37). Young girls from poor families were sold into domestic service with the assumption that they would be freed from service at the age of 18 into marriage. The *mui tsai* were responsible for domestic chores and childcare. Unfortunately, they often suffered mistreatment and did not marry but were sold into prostitution. Similar to the prostitute, *mui tsai* lacked political and legal rights, suffered racism and the absence of family support. Their only means to freedom were

through Mission Homes and the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. The race-gender-class dynamic reflects, again, the victimization of poor Chinese females, but at the hands of wealthier *Chinese* families.

The last group of Chinese women included immigrant merchant wives. This merchant class eventually became the “ruling elite in Chinatown, and their families formed the basis for the growth of the Chinese American population and the formation of the middle class” (Yung 1995: 41). This class of women had bound feet which limited their contact with the outside world. They remained in the home embroidering and watching their children because they had domestic servants who did the household chores. Though these women led genteel lives, they too were bound property of men and constrained in their daily lives. These merchant women experienced gender/class oppression through the abusive class practice of footbinding and the patriarchal belief that they belonged to men.

This brief description of Chinese women and their roles in 19th century America reflects a transfer to the United States of Chinese traditional roles and the continued subordination (exploitation) of Chinese women. They were constrained by ideologies and institutional structures imposed by the United States (racism, sexism, restrictive laws, etc.) and by cultural factors imposed by Chinese culture (e.g., patriarchy, Confucianism). Though the subordination of Chinese women and their daughters continued, changes occurred within this population as their numbers increased, as they found more opportunities for occupational and educational attainment.

The percentage of Chinese Americans entering America declined during the Exclusion period (1883-1943), although their numbers began to increase after 1900. This increase was due to worsening conditions in China, combined with the decline in cultural restrictions on Chinese women’s migration. The majority of the Chinese women who migrated were merchant wives.

The conditions of women improved in the early 1900s: prostitution was on the decline due to female moral reformers in the US, Chinese nationalist leaders in China, and the freeing of hundreds of servant girls by Mission Homes. Conditions also improved for immigrant wives because “their contributions as homemakers, wage earners, and culture bearers made them indispensable partners to their husbands in their struggle for economic survival” in the US (Yung 1995: 77). Combined with “changing social attitudes toward women in Chinatown[s]” (Yung

1995: 77), women gained “leverage to shape gender arrangements within their homes and in the community” (Yung 1995: 77).

With time, women began to enter the public sphere and work outside of the home. While Chinese men mostly worked as laborers, servants, factory workers, laundrymen, and merchants, most women found work in garment factories, food processing factories, and domestic service. Unlike European immigrant women who could eventually move from low-paying, unskilled jobs to better-paying, skilled jobs, Chinese women lacked language skills and political power (not to mention all the while enduring racism) to improve their working status. Thus, limited skills and opportunities constrained Chinese women to menial jobs.

Though they worked in menial jobs, working outside of the home provided Chinese women with the means to economically support and increase their families’ socioeconomic status. Moving outside of the home allowed them to come into contact with others and join community organizations if they chose (i.e., Church, YMCA, Chinese Women’s Jeleab Association). It should be noted that even with the increase in their freedom, Chinese women continued to be exploited in the work area.

Second-generation Chinese women came into maturity during the 1920s. Unlike their mothers, their feet were not bound,

[N]or were they constrained by Chinese traditions. Born and raised in the United States, they held political rights as native Americans; they could speak English and were educated and acculturated through the public schools, church, and popular culture . . . . As U.S. citizens, they wanted and expected to fulfill their potential in all aspects of their lives-- in education and work, in social and political activities; but they were prevented from doing so by sexism at home and racism in the larger society (Yung 1995: 107).

These women desired to be autonomous but gender role expectations inhibited their freedom. In addition, though their educational and social backgrounds differed from their parents, they continued to be relegated and restricted to low-paying occupations in Chinatowns.

In the 1930s, the Great Depression actually improved the conditions for many Chinese Americans. They benefited from federal relief programs and found employment in sewing, domestic service, sales, and clerical work (Yung 1995: 180; Yung 1986: 49). Chinese American women were less affected by unemployment than men, and improved political conditions allowed them to better their conditions regarding family and community (Yung 1995: 180; Yung 1986: 60-61).

World War II brought about the end of the Great Depression and “marked the beginning of significant socioeconomic and political change for women and racial minorities” (Yung 1995: 223). American patriotism and Chinese nationalism inspired Chinese American women to enter into areas of fund-raising, propaganda, civil defense, the Red Cross, armed services, and defense factories. This time period opened opportunities for Chinese American women to “improve their socioeconomic status, broaden their public role, and fall in step with their men and follow Americans during a time of national crisis” (Yung 1995: 223).

Women’s economic roles expanded during this time period but economic gains and progress were lost once the war ended. However, Chinese American women “experienced less discrimination during and after the war because of China’s allied relationship with the United States” (Yung 1995: 224). Though Chinese American women remained subordinated to men, they made progress in the areas of education, employment, and politics (Espiritu 1997: 42; Yung 1995: 224; Yung 1986: 60-61).

This history of the Chinese in America, in particular the role of Chinese women in America reveals both their compliance and resistance to traditional gender roles. We see that with each passing generation, these women have made progressive gains in the areas of economics, politics, education, and family life, even in the face of great opposition.

#### Perceptions of Asians in America

Changing social, political, and economic conditions abroad and within the United States shaped and continues to shape the relationship between the larger society and Asian Americans. For example, between the 1840s and the early 1940s, popular public sentiment regarding the Chinese in America was to bar and banish them based on their “unassimiable” cultural, racial and personality traits (which were deemed contrary to “American ways”) (Wang 1991: 181, 193). However, following World War II, the dominant group began to stereotype Chinese Americans as a “model minority,” a term which emerged in the 1960s, praising the accomplishments of Asian Americans. In particular, Japanese and Chinese Americans were commended for their educational, occupational and economic success (Fong 1998: 56; Wang 1991: 181).

The employment of the term “model minority” by whites was used to “show that the United States is the land of opportunity and contend that government programs . . . are

unnecessary” (Fong 1998: 57). The term suggests that poor immigrants who work hard will enable themselves to advance socially and economically (Fong 1998: 68). Though the image may more likely apply to post-1965 immigrants who had greater human capital than their immigrant predecessors, the image can do more harm than good. First, the myth diverts attention away from the many social and economic problems affecting the Asian American population. Second, it minimizes racial discrimination directed at Asian Americans. Third, it creates pressure for academic and occupational success among Asian American youth. And lastly, it creates tensions between Asian Americans and other racial minorities (Fong 1998: 57). By “describing Asian Americans as model minorities, the diverse and complex experiences of Asian Americans remains hidden” (Lee 1996: 5). The label serves as a hegemonic device which “maintains the dominance of whites in the racial hierarchy by diverting attention from racial inequality and by setting standards for how minorities should behave” (Lee 1996: 5). In other words, the imposition of the stereotype creates an image for how racial minorities believe that they ought to and should behave. Through the “model minority” stereotype, Asian Americans may perceive any failure to fulfill the stereotype as reflecting their own failures rather than attributing it to structural and ideological factors.

The perception and treatment of Chinese Americans by the larger society affects how Chinese Americans perceive themselves. For example, Wang (1991) identifies five Chinese American mentalities. Each orientation is affected

[B]y changes in China, in the United States, in US-China relations and in Chinese perceptions of themselves in relation to these changes. Although each type emerges from a distinct historical setting, all five are found among the Chinese in the United States today and all are still changing and interacting with each other (Wang 1991: 192).

Briefly, the following orientations shaped by the historical interaction between white Americans and Chinese are: sojourner mentality, total assimilation, accommodation, ethnic pride and consciousness, and the uprooted. The *sojourner* mentality emerged from 1) the immigrant’s belief that he would go the US, become wealthy, and return to China, 2) European American perceptions that Chinese were “heathen” and nonassimilable, 3) the hostile and discriminatory treatment of the Chinese in America, and most importantly, 4) loyalty to China and its culture (Wang 1991: 195). Taken together, these components shape the sojourner mentality. American-born Chinese were the most likely to have the *assimilationist* mentality. Those American-

educated individuals quickly became aware of the racial, cultural, social, and legal differences between themselves and their white peers. They believed that by rejecting Chinese culture and practices and by emulating white ways, they could assimilate into American society and gain acceptance by their white peers (Wang 1991: 196-197). The *accommodation* mentality reflected a survivalist strategy in that if the option to return to China were severed, one learned to adapt to “an American life-style in public without fundamentally changing [one]’s Chinese lifestyle and cultural values” (Wang 1991: 200). The *ethnic pride and consciousness* mentality stemmed from the 1960s. It was part of a movement to reconceptualize Chinese American identity as well as to recognize shared experiences as Chinese in America. These individuals sought to study and understand Chinese American history and to build up its community (Wang 1991: 201). Lastly, the *uprooted* mentality was exhibited by highly educated elite Chinese who choose not to return to their homeland. They believed that China’s inability to achieve modernization under the existing political and social order would impede their ability to serve their country effectively. They also viewed the US as providing opportunities for educational and career advancement. In addition, the freedom of expression afforded Americans was highly appealing to those who were seldom given this privilege in their home country (Wang 1991: 204). Thus, for political and social reasons, these individuals opted to remain in the US.

Relatedly, the perceptions of minority group members of their incorporation into the host society and their responses to discriminatory treatment by the dominant group shapes their “success or failure” in the host society (Gibson and Ogbu 1991: 8). According to Ogbu, the academic performance of racial/ethnic minority children varies according to the type of “cultural model” that they follow. He defines a cultural model as racial/ethnic minorities’ “understandings of how their society or any particular domain or institution works and their respective understandings of their places in that working order” (Gibson and Ogbu 1991: 7). The model provides a framework for how minority group members can understand and respond to particular situations that they encounter, and how this may affect the images of their own group.

Ogbu suggests that minority group success or failure (in academics or otherwise) is shaped by two factors which in turn mold one’s cultural model. These two factors, as mentioned above, include minority group incorporation into the host society and adaptive responses to discrimination from the dominant group. Ogbu argues that minority members are either voluntarily or involuntarily incorporated into their host society. Immigrant minorities (those

who voluntarily immigrate) move believing that the new host society will provide better opportunities than their old society. The expectations of improvement affect their perceptions and responses to the dominant group in that they interpret prejudice, discrimination and potential barriers as temporary and passing with “time, hard work, or more education” (Gibson and Ogbu 1991: 10-11). They are optimistic about the future and accept prejudice and discrimination, often because of their perceived “foreign status.”

In contrast, involuntary minorities are those “brought into their present society through slavery, conquest or colonization” (Gibson and Ogbu 1991: 9). They resent their loss of freedom and perceive barriers to any social, political and/or economic success as attributable to institutionalized oppression (Gibson and Ogbu 1991: 9). Without a homeland to equate their old situation to the present, they compare their present situation to that of the dominant group and find that their conditions are worse than before simply because they belong to the minority group. Consequently, they believe that any discrimination or prejudice that they experience is systemic. They are not optimistic about the future because they do not perceive that the system will change. Though they may declare that hard work and educational endeavors may change their situation, they conclude that barriers are institutionalized and that structural change requires more than one’s individual efforts (Gibson and Ogbu 1991: 14).

In sum, the difference of incorporation into the host society and the responses to that incorporation affect one’s cultural model. One’s cultural model in turn shapes the ability for “success” in society by affecting the strategies one employs to cope with discrimination. Applying this theory to the Chinese, their voluntary migration to America, coupled with the expectations of economic success, influenced their responses to dominant group stereotypes and discrimination. Rather than interpret negative perceptions and treatment as systemic, they believed that over time and with hard work they would eventually be accepted and find success. In short, according to Ogbu, the ways in which the Chinese were incorporated into America affected their reaction to the larger society and increased the probability of their “success” in America. Though it appears that the Chinese have achieved social, political and economic success, one consequence of their “success” is the creation of the “model minority” stereotype and the perception that they are more willing to accept individual and institutional mistreatment.

Changing political, social, and economic conditions also affect how Asian Americans perceive other Asian Americans as well as themselves. According to a study conducted by

Hayano (1981), individuals from distinct Asian ethnic groups are commonly either misidentified or lumped together and defined as “Asian American.” As a consequence, they often exhibit an *ethnic identification* which entails “the reactions taken by ethnic groups who are perceived by themselves or by outsiders to be ‘close,’ who might be mistaken for one another, and who feel the need to establish their authentic ethnic status” (Hayano 1981: 158). For example, Hayano suggests that early contact between the Japanese and Chinese in America was limited due to separate Little Tokyo and Chinatown living establishments. Moreover, because of anti-Asian sentiment originally geared toward the Chinese in America, the Japanese preferred to disassociate themselves from a “Chinese” identity (Hayano 1981: 161). Similarly, during World War II when the US government herded Japanese Americans into “relocation” camps, many Chinese distanced themselves from any association with the Japanese to avoid being similarly mistreated (although the Chinese already viewed the Japanese with great distaste and even hatred due to war aggressions committed to them by the Japanese during WWII). Thus, changing international and internal conditions shaped the perceptions that Asians had of other Asian ethnic groups, as well as of their own ethnic group.

In addition, self-perceptions are greatly influenced by historical and contemporary racial stereotypes and beliefs that other Americans have about Asian immigrants and Asian countries (e.g., they are a perceived economic threat to white working-class workers; Asians are viewed as a Yellow Peril). Most commonly, white Americans depicted Asians as subhuman, inhuman, and superhuman (Wei 1993). Characterizations by whites suggested that Asians have a low regard for human life, lack compassion while seeking to control the world, and/or that “they are geniuses who possessed the hoary wisdom of the East, or masters of some arcane science or art form, which could be perverted for evil purposes” (Wei 1993: 48). These perceptions “convey implicit messages about the peculiar genetic makeup and cultural values of Asians” (Wei 1993: 48). Furthermore, these stereotypes function to differentiate white Americans from Asians and Asian Americans who are assumed to be “innately inferior because of biology or culture” (Wei 1993: 48).

Stereotypes also depict Asian men as “both asexual and as threats to white women” (Espiritu 1997: 90). Historical context drives these bipolar stereotypes. On the one hand, nativist fears at the turn of the century promoted “racist depictions of Asian men as ‘lascivious and predatory’ ” (Espiritu 1997: 90). On the other hand, exclusionary laws prohibiting the



admittance of Asian women and the forced creation of bachelor societies prompted the “construction of Asian masculinity from ‘hypersexual’ to ‘asexual’ to even ‘homosexual’ ” (Espiritu 1997: 90). Modern-day stereotypes, particularly the “‘model minority’ stereotype further emasculates Asian American men as passive and malleable” (Espiritu 1997: 90-91).

As with men, bipolar stereotypes are also employed to describe Asian and Asian American women. Again, these depictions are historically and socially driven: the perceptions of Asian women as erotic/exotic, submissive/subservient, and/or diabolic and cunning are highly related to the historical and cultural experiences and roles these women played in the late nineteenth to early twentieth century (e.g., prostitute, maid). On the one hand, a woman is characterized as the “Dragon Lady, a female counterpart to the diabolical Fu Manchu” (Ling 1990: 11). On the other hand, she is also described as the “Shy Lotus Blossom or China Doll: demure, diminutive, and deferential” (Ling 1990: 11). Continuous dissemination of these stereotypes in the media suggest that “Asian women, when powerful, are seen as dangerous and treacherous; and when powerless, as sexual objects and submissive servants not to be taken seriously” (Ling 1990: 12). In total, the stereotypes serve to obstruct the full exploration and development of Asian and Asian American women as well as fostering and justifying their subordination to white and Asian men. Thus, understanding the effects of stereotypes (especially of Asian American women by the larger society, by Asian American men, as well as by Asian American women themselves) as they affect women is important for examining their identity.

Taken together, these stereotypes serve to compartmentalize the diversity and strength among Asians and Asian Americans. The stereotypes rationalize the institutionalized maintenance and perpetuation of their subordination in relation to the white establishment. Thus, significant to the development of a positive racial-ethnic identity is an accurate understanding of one’s history. This includes knowledge of the political and economic conditions of the host society in relation to one’s group and how these conditions led to and perpetuate oppression and the formation of stereotypes. Equally important to a positive racial-ethnic identity is understanding the use and function of racial-ethnic labels, as well as the ability to negate racial stereotypes. When combined, such knowledge and abilities allow for the better understanding of self and group identity.

In effect, these portrayals of Asian men and women serve to perpetuate and justify classist, racist and sexist ideologies. Whether positive or negative, they are harmful, false

images that cloud the full appreciation of group and self, affecting Asians and Asian Americans by “demeaning their dignity by denying them individuality, undermining their identity by limiting their self-expression and self-development, [and] engendering ambivalent feelings by instilling self-hatred” (Wei 1993: 50).

In short, this study seeks to examine the racial-ethnic identity formation of Chinese American women and to assess the utility of existing identity theories. In general, the review of ethnic identity developmental models suggests that identity development is a linear, progressive, stage-like process from a negative self-concept to an acceptance and celebration of an ethnic identity. In light of the theoretical and empirical analyses presented earlier, these stage models may be inappropriate in describing the ethnic identity formation of Chinese American women. First, identity formation may be fluid and situationally contingent (Kibria 1997; Yeh and Huang 1996; Kinket and Verkuyten 1997). The empirical data finds that identity is not necessarily unidirectional and can manifest itself in various forms (e.g., choosing to identify ethnically or pan-ethnically). Second, the experiences of Asian Americans differ from that of other racial-ethnic groups and feelings of “different-ness” affect their perception and formation of self (Phinney 1989; Phinney and Alipuria 1990; Kim 1981). Third, broader social-psychological approaches to identity emphasize the effects of Others on the emergence of particular identities in certain circumstances. Broader social-psychological approaches stress the situationality of identities, which can allow for the presence of multiple identities at one time (e.g., ethnic *and* gender identities). Lastly, few studies examine women or how multiple identities alter the developmental process. Taken together, it is clear that process of racial-ethnic identity formation is likely to be complex and that a closer examination of Asian American identity, particularly that of Chinese American women, is warranted.

#### Relevance of the Project

Sociological theories of ethnic identity center on the ascriptive nature of ethnicity and/or the role of structure in ethnic identity development. Ethnic identity models present the psychological stages of ethnic identity development: how ethnic identity is formed and how this formation affects individual and group perceptions and behaviors. Social-psychological theories of identity focus on the socially constructed categories of self obtained from taking the role of others and from social comparison processes. In addition, they may help to supplement the steps

leading from stage to stage of ethnic identity models. This study, in part, strives to demonstrate the significance of these theoretical frameworks, which in turn, will hopefully provide a contribution to identity literature. More specifically, I explore through interviews whether any of the ethnic identity development models adequately fit the Chinese American female experience, and whether and how sociological and social psychological theories contribute to describing this experience more completely.

In addition, because we live in a society where racial minorities may believe and internalize the racist and sexist beliefs and stereotypes of the dominant group, and may believe the sexist notions espoused by one's own ethnic group, we must explore the process of positive/non-stereotypical identity formation. This study is an important means to better comprehend how Asian American women perceive themselves and how they relate to others. The study will hopefully provide a means for helping Asian American women better understand their place and role in the larger society and in their own communities along racial/ethnic and gender lines.

## CHAPTER II:

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study focuses on Chinese American female identity development, while also exploring the theoretical utility of sociological and social psychological models of identity. It addresses such issues as perceptions on gender, thoughts about American and Chinese culture, living as an American with Chinese ancestry, and the effects of internalized racism and stereotypes on ethnic identity development.

In-depth personal interviews were used to examine these issues. Different research methods could have been employed to examine racial-ethnic identity development. For example, one could have used surveys to explore racial-ethnic identity. This research method has certain advantages: surveys save time and money, research can be conducted at one point in time, the sample size can be large, and questions and responses can be standardized. However, quantitative methods are better suited for studies that seek to “obtain a small amount of information from a large number of subjects” (Marshall and Rossman 1995: 96) on relatively well-defined and measured topics. Qualitative research, on the other hand, enables the researcher to accrue more detailed information, with greater flexibility, on topics that are less well-defined or understood. Because there has been limited exploration into the topic of the ethnic identity of Chinese American women, qualitative methods are an appropriate approach to its inquiry and examination. Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research permits the researcher to observe, in-depth, people’s words and behaviors, which are difficult to obtain from standardized responses to survey studies. The researcher can probe for information and unveil complex issues in a setting comfortable for the participant. Thus, qualitative research enables the researcher to gain a greater in-depth understanding of the topic at hand compared to quantitative research methods. Given the multifaceted nature of identity as it is affected by self, others, ideologies and the social structure (as described in Chapter 1), qualitative research allows the researcher to examine and uncover the complexities and nuances of its development and meaning. In addition, qualitative research can better capture the *process* of identity development (if it exists) from detailed descriptions provided by the respondents.

Thus, the research questions presented in this study were examined through a qualitative, exploratory study. Interviews were employed using predominantly in-depth, unstructured questions to derive an informed picture of Chinese American female identity formation. I used this form of research method to unveil the process and complexity of racial-ethnic identity development. Through qualitative research, I interacted with participants and drew out their life experiences and beliefs to reveal whether and in what ways their racial-ethnic identity has changed over time.

### Research Population and Site Selection

Interviews were conducted with 30 college-aged Chinese American women attending a large public university in southern California. I chose to focus on Chinese Americans because they are the largest group of Asian Americans in the US, in order to keep the sample as homogenous as possible, and because I am Chinese American and have a special interest in this group. Sample homogeneity is desired to increase the generalizability of the findings to the sample and it helps to ensure that any findings were likely to be observed among other similar samples. I studied women, again, to maintain sample homogeneity and because a) the research problem focuses on racial-ethnic identity development as it occurs among women, b) the experiences of women likely differ from men, c) past research predominantly focuses on men rather than women, and d) women are more likely to be comfortable with a female interviewer than would men (given that I am female).

I centered my study on respondents between the ages of 18 -25. Some drawbacks to restricting the sample to this age range include: 1) a need for studies exploring how ethnic identity varies over a lifetime, among women of varying age groups, geographic locations, and social classes, 2) limiting the theoretical generalizability of the study for individuals who fall outside of this age restriction, and 3) narrowing the class range of the respondents. That is, college students are more likely to represent a particular social class, thus the sample in this study more than likely reflect that fact, consequently biasing the study results to that of a higher social class. However, I chose to study college age individuals 1) to further homogenize the sample, 2) it increased the ease and efficiency of finding participants at one location, 3) I submit that one's college experience represents a time for the exploration and unfolding of one's identity (not just ethnic identity, but other self-definitions such as gender, major, possible occupations,

etc.), and 4) controlling for age helped to ensure that the findings were representative of a particular sample and reflected an honest account of their experiences.

In addition, the study focused on American citizens and not immigrants because an immigrant might attribute varying forms of discrimination to her *immigrant* status rather than to her *race* or *gender* status. In addition, she may draw from her native culture (which provides structure) from which she can gain a sense of self (Wang 1995: 109). Thus, because the immigrant experience and immigrant status may complicate the respondent's perception of ethnicity, the study centered on American-born women of Chinese ancestry.

Since my sample drew from a college in California, many within the sample resided in California. The results of the study may be biased with regards to geographic location and the high number of Asian Americans/Chinese Americans in California and within its public school systems. However, because the majority of Asian Americans/Chinese Americans live either on the East or West coast, with its higher numbers of Asian Americans/Chinese Americans (Kitano and Daniels 1995: 1; Min 1995: 1), and because many Asian Americans/Chinese Americans do attend college (Kitano and Daniels 1995: 173-175; Min 1995: 2), the results may be theoretically generalizable (but of course not statistically generalizable) to public university, undergraduate, Chinese American females on the West coast.

The following is a demographic description of the respondents (See Table 2).

### Generation

Although I attempted to focus the study on American citizens and not immigrants, some 1.5 generation individuals volunteered for the study. During the announcements asking for study participants, I listed and stressed the criteria for the study, that is, women, born in the US, of Chinese ancestry, between the ages of 18 to 25. However, eight women volunteered for the study who were not American-born. Of these eight women, four participants entered into the US under the age of two. The other four participants arrived between the ages of five to eight. I agreed to interview these women since they volunteered for the study and to discover if and how their thoughts and experiences might differ from that of American-born Chinese women. The respondents acknowledged that although they were born in other countries, they came to the US at such young ages so they felt that they were raised American and did not identify with the immigrant status or experience. Thus, the data gathered from these eight interviews remained in

**Table 2: Key Sample Characteristics**

| <b>Generation</b> |          |
|-------------------|----------|
| 1.5               | 27% (8)  |
| 2/2+              | 73% (22) |

| <b>Age</b> |          |
|------------|----------|
| 18-19      | 37% (11) |
| 20         | 26% (8)  |
| 21-25      | 37% (11) |

| <b>Birthplace</b> |          |
|-------------------|----------|
| SCA               | 43% (13) |
| NCA               | 17% (5)  |
| Other US          | 13% (4)  |
| Non-US            | 27% (8)  |

| <b>Raised</b> |          |
|---------------|----------|
| SCA           | 80% (24) |
| NCA           | 17% (5)  |
| Other         | 3% (1)   |

| <b>Class Level</b> |          |
|--------------------|----------|
| 1                  | 3% (1)   |
| 2                  | 30% (9)  |
| 3                  | 20% (6)  |
| 4/4+               | 47% (14) |

| <b>Academic Study</b> |          |
|-----------------------|----------|
| Undeclared            | 3% (1)   |
| Humanities            | 13% (4)  |
| Social Sciences       | 37% (11) |
| English               | 7% (2)   |
| Natural Sciences      | 20% (6)  |
| Computer Sciences     | 7% (2)   |
| Engineering           | 10% (3)  |
| Double Major          | 3% (1)   |

| <b>Contact</b>          |          |
|-------------------------|----------|
| Ethnic Studies          | 40% (12) |
| Club                    | 17% (5)  |
| Ethnic Studies Referral | 13% (4)  |
| Club Referral           | 30% (9)  |

| <b>Ethnic Club</b> |          |
|--------------------|----------|
| Yes                | 43% (13) |
| No                 | 57% (17) |

| <b>Ethnic Course</b> |          |
|----------------------|----------|
| Yes                  | 67% (20) |
| No                   | 33% (10) |

the study. Of the remaining sample respondents, 21 were second generation Americans and one was a fourth generation Chinese American.

### Age

The women's ages ranged from 18-25. One respondent was aged 18. The majority of women were aged 19 or 20 (11 women age 19; 8 women age 20). Four women were age 21, three age 22, two age 23, and 1 at age 25.

### Birth Place

The greater portion of the sample was born in California (13 born in southern California, 5 born in northern California). Four women were born in other parts of the US (New Jersey, Illinois, Hawaii and Wisconsin). Of the 1.5 generation respondents, four were born in Taiwan, two in Hong Kong, one in Vietnam and one in the Philippines. An overwhelming number of the women were raised in southern California (24) with the remainder brought up in northern California (5) or in Hawaii (1).

### Class Level and Academic Studies

Regarding class level, one respondent was a first year student. Nine respondents were second year students. Six women were third year students. Fourteen respondents were fourth year or more students. The respondents varied in their area of concentration: four women majored in the Humanities, twelve respondents majored in the Social Sciences, five in the Natural Sciences, three engineers, two in Computer Sciences, two English majors, one undeclared, and one combined Social Sciences/International Studies major.

### Marital Status

Only one respondent was married. The remaining 29 women were single.

### Data Collection Procedures

This section describes the process by which the study was completed. Through snowball sampling, college-aged Chinese American women were interviewed to establish their racial-ethnic identity formation. The following elaborates on the use of in-depth interviewing and snowball sampling.



## In-Depth Interviews

Through in-depth interviewing, a participant's experiences and observations are understood in face-to-face interaction, in contrast to the artificiality of a laboratory or a mailed questionnaire. In contrast to other inquiry methods, interviewing provides details that statistical analysis or short survey answers cannot. In addition, interviewing includes the recognition of context which gives meaning to the complexities of human interaction, behavior and understanding.

The interviews in this study took on a focused but unstructured format. This form of qualitative interviewing is often described as "a conversation with a purpose" (Kahn and Cannell 1957: 149). The participants "talk," enabling the interviewer to understand "how participants view their worlds . . . [and] relate what is in their minds" (Rossman and Rallis 1998: 124). Though the participants were free to express themselves in a conversational manner, I used an interview guide (See Appendix A) to keep the interview focused on the topic at hand. All interviews were tape recorded with the participant's permission and later transcribed.

Interviews were conducted when and where convenient for the participant. Each session covered the following subject areas: 1) childhood memories and experiences, 2) perceptions of ethnic identification and labeling, 3) perceptions and identification with other Asian ethnic groups, 4) attitudes and beliefs regarding stereotypes (e.g., of Chinese/Asian Americans males, Chinese American females, etc.), 5) perceptions of self as a Chinese American female, 6) experiences with racism and sexism, 7) dating practices, 8) school experiences, and 9) current ethnic lifestyle and ethnic practices. Questions were asked to stimulate thoughts and reflections on one's racial-ethnic identity.

To ensure the accuracy of the respondent's reflections and position regarding ethnic identity, I employed the same terms in the interview that each interviewee applied to herself (i.e., Chinese, Asian American, etc.).

## Sampling

Snowball sampling refers to a non-probability sampling technique. First, individuals who fulfill the criteria for participation are identified and interviewed. They are then asked to suggest others who qualify as participants. These participants are interviewed. They, in turn, identify others, and so on. Because snowball sampling is a form of convenience sampling, there is an increased probability of sampling bias. That is, because the participants are recruited by fellow acquaintances, it is possible that their perspectives, viewpoints, and experiences will reflect similarities in background. Consequently, the interviews will reflect similar interpretations of reality. One way to reduce sampling bias is to sample for variability (Weiss 1994: 24). Variability refers to intentionally sampling for respondents who resemble each other on a number of characteristics (e.g., Chinese American, female, etc.), yet differ in other areas (e.g., choice of major in college) so as to increase the probability that a wide range of respondents' experiences will be heard. In this study, sampling on the basis of major (e.g., humanities, social sciences, natural sciences) was used to increase variability because it may be that those drawn to the social sciences have an increased awareness of ethnic identity issues compared to those in the non-social sciences. Respondents majored in the Social Sciences (37%), Natural Sciences (20%), Humanities (13%), Engineering (10%), English (7%), Computer Sciences (7%), Double Major (3%; International Studies/Social Science), and one undeclared (3%). Sampling deliberately for those who were not enrolled in ethnic classes or ethnic clubs was also employed to enhance variability in self-identities (See Table 3). In this study, 43% of the respondents participated in an ethnic club (57% did not) and 67% enrolled in an ethnic studies course (33% did not). Variability was also increased by identifying participants through a variety of contacts via ethnic studies courses (40%) and clubs (17%). The participants were also contacted through ethnic studies course referrals (13%) and through ethnic studies club referrals (30%). When similar patterns and themes emerged among the respondents' experiences, then these patterns and themes were more readily generalized theoretically to a larger population.

Snowball sampling may also be biased because the sample is not representative of the larger population. Unlike findings based on random sampling (where any individual has an equal opportunity to be chosen for a sample), the findings from a snowball sample cannot be generalized statistically to a population. Thus, convenience sampling limits the generalizability

**Table 3: Group Percentages**

|                                       | <u>Unformed</u> | <u>Unimportant</u> | <u>Identified</u> | <u>Positive</u> |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| <b><u>Generation</u></b>              |                 |                    |                   |                 |
| 1.5                                   | 67% (4)         | 18% (2)            | 40% (2)           | 0               |
| 2/2+                                  | 33% (2)         | 82% (9)            | 60% (3)           | 100% (8)        |
| <b><u>Age</u></b>                     |                 |                    |                   |                 |
| 18-19                                 | 33% (2)         | 36% (4)            | 80% (4)           | 25% (2)         |
| 20                                    | 0               | 36% (4)            | 0                 | 50% (4)         |
| 21-25                                 | 67% (4)         | 27% (3)            | 20% (1)           | 25% (2)         |
| <b><u>Birthplace</u></b>              |                 |                    |                   |                 |
| SCA                                   | 17% (1)         | 45% (5)            | 40% (2)           | 75% (6)         |
| NCA                                   | 17% (1)         | 18% (2)            | 20% (1)           | 13% (1)         |
| Other US                              | 0               | 18% (2)            | 20% (1)           | 13% (1)         |
| Non-US                                | 67% (4)         | 18% (2)            | 20% (1)           | 0               |
| <b><u>Raised</u></b>                  |                 |                    |                   |                 |
| SCA                                   | 83% (5)         | 91% (10)           | 40% (2)           | 75% (6)         |
| NCA                                   | 17% (1)         | 9% (1)             | 60% (3)           | 13% (1)         |
| Other                                 | 0               | 0                  | 0                 | 13% (1)         |
| <b><u>Class Level</u></b>             |                 |                    |                   |                 |
| 1                                     | 0               | 9% (1)             | 0                 | 0               |
| 2                                     | 17% (1)         | 27% (3)            | 80% (4)           | 13% (1)         |
| 3                                     | 17% (1)         | 9% (1)             | 0                 | 50% (4)         |
| 4/4+                                  | 67% (4)         | 55% (6)            | 20% (1)           | 37% (3)         |
| <b><u>Academic Study</u></b>          |                 |                    |                   |                 |
| Undeclared                            | 0               | 9% (1)             | 0                 | 0               |
| Humanities                            | 33% (2)         | 0                  | 20% (1)           | 13% (1)         |
| Social Sciences                       | 33% (2)         | 36% (4)            | 20% (1)           | 50% (4)         |
| English                               | 0               | 18% (2)            | 0                 | 0               |
| Natural Sciences                      | 17% (1)         | 18% (2)            | 60% (3)           | 0               |
| Computer Sciences                     | 17% (1)         | 9% (1)             | 0                 | 0               |
| Engineering                           | 0               | 9% (1)             | 0                 | 25% (2)         |
| Double Major                          | 0               | 0                  | 0                 | 13% (1)         |
| <b><u>Contact</u></b>                 |                 |                    |                   |                 |
| Ethnic Studies Club                   | 50% (3)         | 27% (3)            | 20% (1)           | 63% (5)         |
| Ethnic studies referral               | 17% (1)         | 18% (2)            | 20% (1)           | 13% (1)         |
| Ethnic studies referral Club Referral | 33% (2)         | 9% (1)             | 0                 | 13% (1)         |
| Ethnic studies referral Club Referral | 0               | 45% (5)            | 60% (3)           | 13% (1)         |
| <b><u>Ethnic Club</u></b>             |                 |                    |                   |                 |
| Yes                                   | 33% (2)         | 36% (4)            | 40% (2)           | 63% (5)         |
| No                                    | 67% (4)         | 64% (7)            | 60% (3)           | 37% (3)         |
| <b><u>Ethnic Course</u></b>           |                 |                    |                   |                 |
| Yes                                   | 100% (6)        | 36% (4)            | 40% (2)           | 100% (8)        |
| No                                    | 0               | 64% (7)            | 60% (3)           | 0               |

**Table 3: Group Percentages (con't)**

|                               | <u>Unformed</u> | <u>Unimportant</u> | <u>Identified</u> | <u>Positive</u> |
|-------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| <b><u>Neighborhood</u></b>    |                 |                    |                   |                 |
| Diverse                       | 17% (1)         | 46% (5)            | 40% (2)           | 13% (1)         |
| White                         | 17% (1)         | 36% (4)            | 0                 | 25% (2)         |
| Asian                         | 17% (1)         | 0                  | 20% (1)           | 63% (5)         |
| Hispanic                      | 17% (1)         | 0                  | 0                 | 0               |
| White/Asian                   | 17% (1)         | 0                  | 40% (2)           | 0               |
| White/Hispanic                | 17% (1)         | 0                  | 0                 | 0               |
| Hispanic/Asian                | 0               | 18% (2)            | 0                 | 0               |
| <b><u>Language</u></b>        |                 |                    |                   |                 |
| Speaks Chinese                | 67% (4)         | 100% (11)          | 100% (5)          | 87% (7)         |
| English Only                  | 33% (2)         | 0                  | 0                 | 13% (1)         |
| <b><u>Parental Part.</u></b>  |                 |                    |                   |                 |
| Yes                           | 17% (1)         | 82% (9)            | 60% (3)           | 13% (1)         |
| No                            | 83% (5)         | 18% (2)            | 40% (2)           | 87% (7)         |
| <b><u>Social Networks</u></b> |                 |                    |                   |                 |
| Asian                         | 50% (3)         | 50% (3)            | 80% (4)           | 87% (7)         |
| Asian/White                   | 0               | 0                  | 20% (1)           | 0               |
| Diverse                       | 0               | 0                  | 0                 | 13% (1)         |
| Non-Asian                     | 50% (3)         | 50% (3)            | 0                 | 0               |
| <b><u>Dating</u></b>          |                 |                    |                   |                 |
| White                         | 0               | 0                  | 0                 | 0               |
| Asian                         | 17% (1)         | 36% (4)            | 40% (2)           | 87% (7)         |
| Diverse                       | 33% (2)         | 36% (4)            | 20% (1)           | 13% (1)         |
| Non-Asian                     | 50% (3)         | 0                  | 0                 | 0               |
| Asian/White                   | 0               | 27% (3)            | 40% (2)           | 0               |

of the findings beyond the specific sample being studied. However, given the need for an ethnic/gender specific study, and the difficulty in drawing randomly a sample of college-aged Chinese American women students on the West coast, this technique was an appropriate and efficient means for exploring Chinese American female racial-ethnic identity development. Although there are other forms of non-random sampling methods (e.g., quota sampling), snowball sampling saved time and increased the probability that the respondents qualified for inclusion in the sample.

Specifically in this study, participants were identified through existing Chinese American student clubs at the University; Asian American ethnic studies classes; and through faculty at the University. Faculty in the sociology, psychology, and ethnic studies departments, as well as leaders of the Chinese American clubs were contacted with regards to this study. With their permission, I spoke to their classes and clubs about the study and handed out forms, inviting students to speak with me. The form asked the students to leave their names, phone numbers, and email addresses so that I might contact them later to assess their eligibility for participation in the study. Potential participants were contacted over the phone or by email. I then explained the purpose of the study, provided a brief description of my professional and personal history, explained the criteria for participation, obtained their consent, established a time and place to meet, and conducted thirty interviews.

The interviews were administered on campus, in coffee shops, or at the respondent's or my residence. After introductions were made, I inquired if she had any questions regarding the study or the interviewer, presented the consent form to be signed, assured her freedom to disregard any questions or topics if she so desired, and ensured her confidentiality and anonymity during the transcription of the interview before initiating the interview.

In this study, snowball sampling was employed for sampling convenience purposes. Though snowball sampling increased the probability of sampling bias, this study deliberately sampled for range to help decrease bias. Sampling for range also increases the confidence of the study's findings if similar patterns arise across different kinds of Chinese American women (See Table 2).

### Analysis

In qualitative research, data analysis is a continual process. It emerges from the interaction of *gathering* and *focusing* data (Lofland and Lofland 1995). In this study, I followed

analysis procedures suggested by Lofland and Lofland (1995). I transcribed all interviews in this study as soon as possible so as to retain as much information as possible. I also coded each transcript as soon as possible to organize the data and to provide a springboard for further synthesis of data. Next, I wrote memos to amalgamate and give meaning to the codes. These memos were sorted and organized, resorted and reorganized, and eventually integrated. The memos served to establish themes and concepts from the data.

To aid the analysis, I created conceptual diagrams of emerging patterns and themes regarding ethnic identity from each individual interview. Themes referring to perceptions of race/ethnicity, gender, stereotypes, labeling, and identity were particularly noted. Next, individual diagram patterns and themes were compared to one another to detect possible groupings of diagram patterns and themes. When such patterns and/or themes existed, I made possible inferences with regard to Chinese American female identity and its formation.

Emerging patterns were then compared to pre-existing models of ethnic identity development and other social psychological theories of identity. These comparisons served to examine these theories' utility and applicability as well as to illuminate the possible emergence of a new, more complex model of ethnic identity development. Through this analysis, perceptions of self and others were examined to capture the process of Chinese American female identity development.

### Defending Qualitative Research

Qualitative research does not fully receive the "scientific" acceptance attributed to quantitative forms of research. The following section discusses possible weaknesses in qualitative research and ways in which I attempted to counter these problems.

#### Generalizability

In probability sampling, every person has an equal chance of being chosen as a participant in a sample. Because the probability of being chosen is random, the sample is likely to be representative of the population. Thus, findings of the study can be generalized descriptively to the larger population (Weiss 1994: 21-22). In contrast, in non-probability sampling (e.g., snowball sampling), the probability that an individual will be chosen as a respondent is nonrandom. Since participants are not given equal chances for sample selection,

one cannot claim that the sample is representative of the larger population (Bailey 1994: 94). Thus, findings of the study are limited in their *statistical* generalizability. In this study, the findings can at best be *theoretically* generalizable. That is, one can generalize a theoretical relationship or process if such a pattern repeatedly appears in my sample. Though the findings are limited in theoretical generalizability, patterns that emerge regarding racial-ethnic identity formation are of consequence and shed light on the racial-ethnic identity formation of college-aged Chinese American women in southern California.

### Validity

Qualitative inquiry into human behavior produces multiple interpretations and viewpoints from participants. It is the researcher's duty to wade through the participants' viewpoints and produce an honest and thorough account of all these responses and thoughts. Qualitative inquiry reflects the qualitative researcher's interpretations of the participants' interpretations (Rossman and Rallis 1998: 45). How does one determine the truth value (the accuracy of what is being reported) among the interpretations? The truth value of qualitative research is best judged by "how adequately multiple understandings . . . are presented and whether they 'ring true' (have face validity)" (Rossman and Rallis 1998: 45).

Validity refers to one way in which social research is judged. It is the accuracy with which one observes and identifies what one claims to have observed and identified. It questions whether one is measuring what one intends to measure. How does one demonstrate that observations regarding ethnic identity are indeed the perceptions and experiences of one's interviewees and not something else (such as socially desirable responses)? Likewise, how does one demonstrate that one's data interpretations and analysis reflect rigor (Mason 1996: 147-149)? In the first case, validity can be achieved through explicit descriptions of how the researcher "came to a particular interpretation of observed events and incidents" (Emerson 1983: 104). According to Cicourel (1964), this can be achieved by relying on "background knowledge." Background knowledge refers to familiarity with the people and setting being studied (Emerson 1983: 104). Another means to increase validity can occur through analytic induction. When cases or evidence emerge that contradict an expected explanation, steps can be taken to describe and account for the contradiction. The contradiction is then altered into a confirming case by refining the explanation (Katz 1993: 130). Reviewing the contradictory

evidence and modifying the explanation aids in the establishment of validity in that the inclusion of all of the data gathered helps to establish that one has correctly assessed what one intends to assess. Through background knowledge and analytic induction, the researcher can better identify how she came to observe and give meaning to the participants' experiences and thoughts.

In the second case, to demonstrate validity of data analysis and interpretations, one should be able to show in detail how one arrived at the interpretation. Through the careful explanation of how the data is analyzed and how one draws observations, one can better justify the steps by which one made the interpretations (Mason 1996: 150). I have detailed earlier the steps that I followed in the analysis.

### Interviewing Bias

Interviewing bias may occur when questions or comments are skewed to elicit certain responses from the participant. To combat interviewing bias, data collection relies upon the interviewer's ability to elicit detailed and complete material from participants without influencing their responses. Interview bias was combated by following an interview guide (See Appendix A) which offers the issues and concerns of the study and provides a framework from which the reader can judge the quality of the questions that produced the data. In addition, I carefully employed the ethnic term(s) the interviewee used when describing self, as mentioned earlier.

Interviewing bias may also occur when the respondent withholds information or chooses to "shade" the truth (Weiss 1994: 149). In other words, the respondent may conceal the truth to paint a better picture of self or to present a "socially acceptable" image of self. In this study, to increase the likelihood that the respondent answered truthfully and to decrease the chances of eliciting skewed responses, asking about concrete incidents was employed (Weiss 1994: 150) which, according to Weiss (1994), "may be answered from more than one perspective, [but] are less likely to be modifiable by the interviewing context." In other words, by describing concrete incidents, one can better "obtain more reliable information and information easier to interpret" (Weiss 1994: 150) than general opinions and observations.



## Recall Bias

Related to interviewing bias, recall bias occurs when the respondent's memory becomes hazy and his/her report becomes "obscured or distorted or blocked" (Weiss 1994: 149). Consequently, the responses are less than the whole truth and only a partial representation of an incident. The respondent may leave out details of an incident and present a biased account of an event or events. A strategy for handling recall bias again involves asking about concrete incidents (Weiss 1994: 150). The use of concrete incidents helps the respondent to recall more information. However, despite this, it is possible that the participant's memories of how they became aware of their identities may have been hazy, thus, I evaluated how well they recalled key incidents and changes and treated this sharp or blurred recall as information that itself was theoretically relevant.

## Interpretive Bias

Interpretive and reporting bias occurs when one interprets and uses material that supports one's thesis and disregards or downplays material that may contradict or repudiate existing data (Weiss 1994: 213). Recognizing that the researcher, as a member of society and therefore a product of society, possesses qualities and opinions that reflect her environment can combat this last form of bias, at least in part. The chances that one's experiences and opinions may affect the evaluation and reporting of one's material can be repudiated by recognizing this possibility and attempting to maintain an objective lens (Bailey 1994:28-29). Another strategy is to employ analytic deduction techniques of analysis, which I have described above (similar to deviant case analysis). A third strategy to combat interpretative and reporting bias is for the researcher to reveal her beliefs and expectations so that the reader can evaluate how they may have shaped her findings (Marshall 1990).

The following is an account of what I expected to occur in the study: I anticipated that racial-ethnic identity formation would be situational and influenced by external factors. Though the respondent's racial-ethnic identity may follow a progressive path in that one's racial-ethnic awareness may be triggered by and under certain circumstances, and one's racial-ethnic identity may become a more important aspect of one's overall identity at certain times, it is more likely that one's racial-ethnic identity is situationally contingent and manifests itself in different ways. I expected, in other words, participants to have explored or more closely examined their racial-

ethnic identity during the advent of college and to have wavered over time as they learned more about other identities or representations of self. I also expected participants to indicate that ethnic identity expression depended upon the importance of exhibiting that specific identity at a particular time. If there is a cost or advantage to “behaving ethnic,” the individual may stress her “America-ness” or “Asian-ness,” subject to the situation. Racial-ethnic identity may also be influenced by the presence of in-and-out group members: where the individual chooses to live, with whom the individual decides to associate, and in what clubs or community groups the individual opts to participate.

I also expected identification as a Chinese American and/or Asian American to depend upon the context and history of exposure to either ethnic group and on the influence of the dominant group. Individuals could identify as Asian American for 1) political reasons, 2) perceived shared background, upbringing and/or history of oppression, and/or 3) the imposition of the label by the dominant group. Individuals might identify as Chinese American to “preserve their lineage” or in response to their upbringing as individuals of Chinese ancestry.

In relation to ethnic identity development models, I suspected that Chinese Americans would have a Eurocentric frame of mind if they lived in pre-dominantly white communities and if they have had limited access/exposure to other Chinese/Asian Americans. In this study, because the respondents attend a university in California, limited exposure would be unlikely. However, with the high number of Asian Americans in California, and the diversity found within the Asian American community, some subjects may have internalized negative images of Asian Americans. I expected them to feel a need to differentiate themselves from other Asians by stressing their non-Asian-ness or to express discomfort with the idea of being “lumped” together with Asians of different ethnic backgrounds. Overall, I expected participants to feel uncomfortable with the notion of being stereotyped with others of a similar yet different background.

The timing of the study should also influence the subjects’ racial-ethnic identity formation. The study is not conducted during a time of civil upheaval, but rather at a time when multiculturalism and the celebration of ethnic difference is respected if not embraced. Although racial-ethnic exploration may not be of critical importance to some of the subjects, the search for and realization of one’s racial-ethnic and gendered identity should not be severely hampered or accelerated by outside factors.

Overall, I anticipated that racial-ethnic identity formation would be situational and contextually dependent. It may follow a progressive path, in the sense that identity, as a whole, is developmental and dynamic. I expected developmental models of ethnic identity to apply to some degree to some of the women. I anticipated that the women would initially be Euro-identified and hold negative views of ethnic group and self, and following an encounter, they would begin to explore and consider preexisting notions about race relations and stereotypes, followed by a reexamination of their behavior and previously held beliefs. They would then reject formerly held beliefs regarding the dominant group and develop more positive views of self and group. However, I suspected that the broader social-psychological theories described earlier would more likely be evident among the subjects in that their racial-ethnic identities will be influenced by the presence and resultant reaction to Others. Exactly how it is formed and negotiated or how many steps may be involved remains to be explored with this study.

Regarding gendered aspects of ethnic identity, I anticipated that the participant's gendered identity development and awareness would emulate similar processes as their ethnic identities. In other words, if they were conscious about their ethnic identity, then they were more likely to be conscious about their gendered identity, and vice versa. If they were less aware of an ethnic identity, then they would be less cognizant of a gendered identity, and vice versa. In addition, I expected that those attentive to having an ethnic and gendered identity would perceive them as intertwined and equally significant.

Whether or not my expectations were met will be addressed later in the Results section of this work.

### The Researcher

Reviews of ethnic identity literature reveal a gap in studies regarding ethnic identity development from a gendered Asian American perspective. As a Chinese American female, I am interested in establishing its significance and development. Though I have a vested interest in exploring the interpretations of a narrowly defined group, I believe it contributes to the field of identity by having a gendered/ethnic-specific perspective.

Contemporary fieldwork suggests that "elements of the fieldworker's personal biography are not only socially relevant to those studied, but also fundamentally shape the researcher's interpretive and theoretical interests in the field settings" (Weiss 1994: 185). That is, my past

experiences and personal biography as a Chinese American female will shape my interpretations of the data. It is possible that my understandings of the interviewees will be influenced by my status as an “insider.” However, fieldworkers study the social world to “grasp or understand the *meanings* that actions and events have for those studied” (Emerson 1983: 14). To achieve a better understanding of another’s world involves *verstehen*. *Verstehen* is the process of experiencing the social world of others to gain an appreciation and understanding of their world and meanings attributed to their world (Emerson 1983: 14-15). Emerson believes that “fieldwork is not the collection of ‘facts’ or the controlled observation of ‘objective’ events, but rather a deeper holistic experience of learning about the lives, behaviors, and thoughts of others” (Emerson 1983: 15). As a sociologist, I am an “outsider,” observing and analyzing the reports of women about themselves and their experiences to obtain an understanding of how Chinese American women develop a racial-ethnic identity (if they do). But, because I closely resemble the sample population and am an “insider” as well, I believe that I can provide greater insight into and sensitivity to the experiences of the respondents than an “outsider.” Moreover, my subjects may trust me and be more honest with me because they may see me as like them. Unfortunately, I may presume that I understand what they are saying and thus may miss nuances (and to reduce this possibility, I used probing to elicit more elaborate accounts). My dual role as “insider” and “outsider” can lead me to better draw out shared understandings of being Chinese and female in America, while also objectively reporting the observations and findings of the study.

In sum, this study centers on Chinese American women and how they (if they do at all) develop a positive racial-ethnic identity given their possible acceptance of negative racial and gendered beliefs about self and group. Through in-depth interviews, college-aged women described their racial-ethnic identity formation by reflecting on their past and present experiences and behaviors. My analysis of the data included interpretation of the data, as well as a reflection on my beliefs and expectations. I anticipated the ethnic identity formation of some of the women to follow a more progressive pathway described by identity development theories. In addition, I anticipated that broader social-psychological theories would apply in that women’s racial-ethnic identity formation would be situational and influenced by others (particularly among women with more negative or wavering identities). Thus, I expected to find some individuals with developmental ethnic and gendered identity, and more evidence that identities are conditional

and affected by others. One key question, then, is whether these two broad groups of women would differ in the depth and nature of their ethnic identification.

The following chapter described the ways in which Chinese American women ethnically identified themselves and some of the social characteristics that co-varied with their self-conceptions.

## CHAPTER III:

### GROUPINGS

In the interviews, among other things, I asked the women how they would describe themselves and how important their ethnicities were compared to other aspects of self. As I coded the data, it became clear that my interviewees varied in their degree of ethnic identification. I assessed their degree of identification by evaluating their attitudes and perceptions regarding ethnic group and self, and the importance assigned to holding an ethnic identification. I grouped the women into four categories according to degree of ethnic identification. The groupings ranged from unformed ethnic identity to defined sense of ethnic self. In this chapter, general information regarding each group is presented. Then, factors influencing ethnic identification are noted to determine whether any patterns exist that might help explain how the women came to see themselves ethnically and how they viewed their gender identities (if at all).

#### Unformed Ethnic Identity (6 respondents)

This group of women was composed of two types: participants who held an unformed ethnic identity, possibly accompanied with negative perceptions of ethnic group and self, and respondents who initially held negative views of their ethnic group and self, but overtime experienced a change in this perception towards acceptance of ethnic group and self. By “unformed” I mean those women who possessed an undefined sense of ethnic self and/or newly formed ethnic identity.

Among all six women in this group, 33% (2) were aged 18-19; 67% (4) were aged 21-25 (See Table 3). The majority (83%; 5) were raised in southern California. In addition, the majority (67%; 4) were upper-classmen and majored in the Humanities or Social Sciences, while the remaining (2) majored in the Natural Sciences or Computer Sciences. Lastly, 67% of the women did not participate in ethnic clubs, but all women had enrolled in ethnic studies courses.

The first two women in this group maintained their relatively indistinct ethnic identities, lived in non-Asian environments, had limited contact with and exposure to Asians and Asian culture, did not participate in ethnic clubs, and had parents who did not participate in the Chinese community. The first individual held a very negative perception of her ethnic group. She

identified as Asian American only because that was how she believed others perceived her. The second interviewee did not hold such negative views of her ethnic group and, upon enrollment in an ethnic studies course, began to consider how race-ethnicity and gender affected her life, although she still did not perceive herself as possessing an ethnic identity: “It is a little confusing. I've never really thought about this that much. . . . When I fill out those forms, I check Asian American. I don't know really what that entails to adopt that as my identity.”

Of the other four respondents in this group, two of the women lived in non-Asian communities, while the other two lived in an Asian or largely Asian community. Each of these women once brought up the limited presence of Asians and changes in their environment (from Asian to white) as affecting their ethnic awareness. They appeared to recognize a racial-ethnic identity only after entering college. While one of the respondents claimed that she did not think about her ethnicity until college, the other three women discussed feelings of resentment and shame for being Chinese prior to college. These latter three women believed that their negative feelings were due to the perceptions of others that made them feel inferior and alienated. The four women eventually changed their perceptions regarding their in-group and recognized the significance of ethnicity upon entering college. Two women cited ethnic studies courses as catalysts for an acceptance of ethnic self. Three of the women mentioned coming into contact with others and through comparisons in background and experiences, discovering that it was acceptable to recognize and accept their ethnicity. The first woman identified as Chinese American (because she looked Chinese and held American values and interests), Chinese, and sometimes Asian American (but it was a broad term). The second described herself as Chinese, Taiwanese, Asian, and sometimes Asian American (because she was an Asian living in America). The third said she was Chinese, Chinese American, Asian, and Asian American (the term she used varied in order to belong to a group). And the fourth identified as Chinese from Hong Kong, Chinese, Chinese American, or Asian (to be specific and/or to make a political point). Thus, the women's identifications varied from specific to broad (See Table 4). Interestingly, the only commonality among all four women was that they were foreign-born and spoke Chinese. Whether this factored into the degree of ethnic identification among the remaining four foreign-born women will be seen later in the analysis.

**Table 4: Extent of Ethnic Identification**

**Degree of Identification**

**Unformed 20% (6)**

|                  |          |
|------------------|----------|
| Chinese          | 67% (4)* |
| Chinese American | 50% (3)  |
| Asian            | 67% (4)  |
| Asian American   | 83% (5)  |
| Taiwanese        | 17% (1)  |
| American         | 17% (1)  |
| Other            | 33% (2)  |

**Unimportant 37% (11)**

|                  |          |
|------------------|----------|
| Chinese          | 91% (10) |
| Chinese American | 82% (9)  |
| Asian            | 27% (3)  |
| Asian American   | 64% (7)  |
| Taiwanese        | 9% (1)   |
| American         | 45% (5)  |
| Other            | 27% (3)  |

**Identified 16% (5)**

|                  |         |
|------------------|---------|
| Chinese          | 80% (4) |
| Chinese American | 60% (3) |
| Asian            | 40% (2) |
| Asian American   | 80% (4) |
| Taiwanese        | 20% (1) |
| American         | 40% (2) |
| Other            | 40% (2) |

**Positive 27% (8)**

|                  |         |
|------------------|---------|
| Chinese          | 88% (7) |
| Chinese American | 75% (6) |
| Asian            | 38% (3) |
| Asian American   | 63% (5) |
| Taiwanese        | 13% (1) |
| American         | 25% (2) |
| Other            | 38% (3) |

\* Percentages do not sum up to 100 because interviewees could identify themselves in multiple ways



### Unimportant Ethnic Identity (11 respondents)

This grouping composed the largest number of respondents. The representatives of this group took their racial-ethnic identity for granted or it was a constant, but minor aspect of their identity. In other words, ethnic identity was a presence in their lives, but it was of limited importance.

The majority (82%; 9) of the women were second generation or more (See Table 3) and they were fairly evenly distributed by age. Prior to college, the majority (55%; 6) of the women lived in diverse or mixed neighborhoods, while the remaining women lived in white (27%; 3) or Asian (18%; 2) communities. Two of the women were born outside of the US (Taiwan and the Philippines). All women spoke Chinese. Nine (82%) of the women's parents participated socially in the Chinese community. Most of the respondents (64%; 7) did not participate in ethnic clubs or enrolled in ethnic studies courses. Half of the women associated with Asians and the other half kept company with non-Asians.

Four of the women (36%) claimed that they have "always known" that they were Chinese. Other factors that contributed to ethnic self-identification included the perceptions of others (36%; 4), enrollment in an ethnic studies course (36%; 4), resemblance to the wider, ethnically diverse population (and thus ethnicity was taken for granted) (36%; 4), parental upbringing (27%; 3), various aspects of the environment (i.e., ethnic diversity [1], living in California [2], presence of other Chinese [1], presence of Asian/Chinese friends [2]), and racial/ethnic labels on forms and applications [1].

These eleven women mainly self-identified as Chinese (91%; 10; See Table 4) and/or Chinese American (82%; 9). Seven (62%) women identified as Asian American: six felt that the term was too broad and preferred to identify as Chinese American, the seventh preferred the term Asian American to Chinese American expressly because it was less specific. Two women (18%) maintained that ethnic identification depended on the situation, and two respondents created their own ethnic terms ("American Asian" and "American Chinese") because they believed that they displayed more American than Asian traits.

### Identified (5 respondents)

Race/ethnicity more heavily influenced these women's perceptions of self, whether consciously or unconsciously. Whereas in the previous grouping of women, whose ethnicity did not figure prominently in their everyday lives, race/ethnicity did factor in as more of an

overriding characteristic of self for these women. These women appeared to have spent more time contemplating their identities.

The majority of the women (80%; 4) were aged 18-19 (See Table 3). Forty percent (2) were raised in southern California, and the remainder in northern California. Eighty percent (4) were second-year students and the other remaining respondent was a fourth year student. Forty percent (2) of the women majored in the Humanities or Social Sciences, had enrolled in an ethnic studies course, and participated in an ethnic club. While the remaining 60% (3) majored in the Natural Sciences, they had not enrolled in an ethnic studies course or participated in an ethnic club.

All five women cited the perceptions of others as influencing their view of self (whether these were in-group or out-group perceptions). Another factor prominently mentioned as affecting their choice of identification was the audience (80%; 4). That is, who they interacted with influenced their choice of ethnic identification. Parental upbringing (60%; 3) was the third most often cited reason influencing ethnic identification in that their parents informed them that they were Chinese and provided a support system for Chinese culture. Lastly, associating with Asians/Chinese (40%; 2) as well as enrollment in an ethnic studies course (20%; 1) were also mentioned.

The women identified as Chinese (60%; 3; See Table 4) and/or Chinese American (60%; 3) because it was a more specific term, although they were also willing to identify as Asian (40%; 2) or Asian American (80%; 4). Two women also identified as American. The two foreign-born women additionally identified as Taiwanese or as Chinese from Hong Kong.

#### Positive Ethnic Identity (8 respondents)

This last set of women composed the second largest grouping. They differed from all the other women in the sample in that they possessed a positive ethnic identification accompanied with positive perceptions of ethnic self and group.

One respondent was born and raised in Hawaii and another in northern California, while the remaining six respondents (75%; See Table 3) were born and raised in southern California. All but one woman spoke Chinese. Half of the respondents participated in ethnic clubs, and all had enrolled in at least one ethnic studies course. All but one of the women were aware of possessing some form of an ethnic-gendered identity. Among these seven women (87%), the two summer session students felt the most strongly about their ethnic-gendered identities.

The women varied in how they self-identified, but seven identified as Chinese (88%; 7; See Table 4)) and/or Chinese American (50%; 6) because the terms were more “specific.” Six women also chose to identify as Asian (67%; 4)) and/or Asian American (83%; 5), but the terms were considered “general” and broad, so they preferred to describe themselves as Chinese/Chinese American. One woman also identified as Taiwanese (in addition to Chinese, Chinese American, Asian and Asian American).

This last group of women felt the most positively about their ethnic self and group. Although they indicated that they might not proclaim their ethnicity, they expressed pride in being Chinese. They cited many factors as contributing to their ethnic identity awareness and development. For example, living among Asians/the presence of Asians/Asian friends (88%; 7) was the most commonly cited factor affecting ethnic awareness. The perceptions of in-groups and out-groups (50%; 4) were also mentioned. Family upbringing (37%; 3), change in environment (37%; 3), and enrollment in an ethnic studies course (37%; 3) were the next most often discussed factors. Lastly, participation in ethnic clubs and organizations (13%; 1) also helped to foster ethnic awareness and development.

The next section discusses possible factors affecting degree of ethnic identification in more detail.

#### Parental Upbringing and Expressions of being Chinese

Respondents were less likely to be shocked and dismayed to discover that they were ethnically different from their peers when their parents informed them of racial/ethnic differences. Among the *Unformed* respondents, parents either did not discuss or emphasize racial-ethnic differences with their children, or they praised Westerners and imparted negative views regarding their Chinese heritage. For example, one interviewee stated that her mother was highly influential in creating a sense of American/white superiority and Asian/Chinese inferiority. Her mother “kind of has bitterness towards Taiwan and towards Chinese people.” Here in the States, “she'd make these negative comments. We'd go to the Chinese supermarket and she'd be like, ‘Oh, Chinese people are so rude; little things here and there. And like, ‘You should try and be more like Caucasians. Caucasians are more polite or friendly or warm.’”

*Unimportant* participants’ parents were more willing to discuss racial-ethnic differences and possessed a more positive regard towards Chinese culture and passed this opinion on to their children. One respondent stated that,

I think my parents have influenced my sense of being Chinese to a large degree. Just because they expose us to Chinese food and speaking Chinese at home, and to their ideas of how to raise a family, education is important . . . . Those things and traditions, like holidays, like Moon Cake festival or something.

*Identified* and *Positive* women indicated that their parents clearly informed them that they were Chinese: “Don’t forget that you are Chinese” and “Mom taught us that you have to be Chinese, [that you] are Chinese.” One respondent (*Positive*) said that she was Asian because she remembered her father asking her if she was Chinese or American when she was younger. She answered, “American.” Her father was unhappy and insisted that she answer, “Chinese.” This exchange taught her about differences in ethnic identification and the importance of being Chinese to her parents.

Thus, when their parents enlightened them about their Asian ancestry and stressed the need to remember their heritage, they were more likely to be conscious of ethnicity as an aspect of their identity and more likely to be ethnically identified.

Parental upbringing extended into the arena of Chinese cultural awareness and practices. It would seem that the more the respondents exhibited aspects of Chinese culture, the more likely they were to be ethnically aware. Women within each grouping stated that their upbringing was one means of creating and maintaining a sense of ethnic self through their parents’ emphasis on commitment and obligation to others, family values, and pride in one’s heritage. The women believed that showing respect to family and elders represented one key aspect of being Chinese. For example, one interviewee from the *Identified* grouping said that “cultural values, I guess, like respecting older people . . . is important to me.” They stressed that, unlike American culture, Chinese culture emphasized a duty to parents -- sons and daughters should think about them and take into consideration their feelings before making any decisions. One respondent (*Identified*) stated that she respected her parents’ wishes:

Like if my parents don't really want me to go, say on a trip; I will take that into account and ...I have a friend who's—she's Native American, but she is very white. Her mom raised her, her mom is German actually. She's like, ‘Do what you want to do. It is your life. You are 19, you are turning 20. This is the time when you get to choose.’ I'm like, ‘No, that is not fair. My parents raised me.’ She's like, ‘No, it is your life now. You are an adult now.’ I'm like, ‘It doesn't matter. You can't just be like: Yeah, my mom is going to be really upset if I go. And she will let me go because I want to, but that is a responsibility. I am going to be responsible to take that into account. Whereas you, you are being very irresponsible by saying: I am just going to go anyways.’ Even though my mom

would let me go, that is not something that is right. That is just not fair. So, I actually choose to...like I didn't stay at school this summer because I know that my mom would want me to come home. She never had to say it, I just knew.

Thus, some believed that Chinese culture was about placing elders' and parental wishes over one's own desires.

In addition, respondents listed various ways that they celebrated and expressed their heritage with their families. For example, they celebrated various holidays (i.e., Moon Festival and Chinese New Year) which caused them to feel more connected and more Chinese. They also cited visiting family, celebrating one-month-old parties, and attending parades as evidence of being Chinese. Some women listed watching Chinese television and movies, listening to Chinese music, reading Chinese magazines and attending Chinese concerts as reflections of being Chinese. Also, religious practices played a part in how the women exhibited being Chinese, such as going to temple and lighting incense to ancestors. One respondent (*Unimportant*) stated that culture was symbolic of her Chinese-ness:

When I was young, I didn't notice that we were celebrating any Chinese culture. I don't think we did that much. Recently, we've been doing it more and more. I've been taking notice of it. Just this past month, the Moon Festival, we've only been celebrating it recently these past few years. This year, after coming back [from China], I felt even more that I was more Chinese. I was beginning to notice the moon, the stories and connect.

Another respondent (*Positive*) declared that she was Chinese because

One thing, we speak Chinese a lot. We watch Chinese TV, we listen to Chinese music, every New Year's we go visit the family, [and] we practice all the different festivals. In the way we cook, the way we eat, it's not all hamburgers and French fries.

Like the previous respondent, half of the women cited food as an important aspect of being Chinese. Cooking and going to Asian eateries reinforced the idea that they were Chinese. They felt that they could observe Chinese culture by eating and/or cooking Chinese food. For example, one woman (*Unimportant*) was asked, "What do you think makes you feel Chinese?" She answered, "Eating Chinese food! Definitely!"

Overall, the respondents believed that participation in these cultural activities reflected their parent's practices, values and beliefs as Chinese, which in turn influenced their perceptions of being Chinese. Specifically, among the *Unformed* women, respondents indicated that Chinese

culture was expressed through food (83%; 5), language (67%; 4), Chinese values and beliefs (33%; 2), celebrating holidays (17%; 1), and respecting parents (17%; 1). *Unimportant* participants believed that they demonstrated Chinese culture through food (55%; 6), language (82%; 9), celebrating holidays (73%; 8), going to temple (9%; 1), and watching Chinese films/listening to Chinese music (9%; 1). *Identified* participants (two of the respondents were not questioned on this subject) believed that language (60%; 3), holidays (20% 1), and listening to Chinese music/watching Chinese tapes (20%; 1) were all expressions of Chinese culture. Lastly, *Positive* women pointed to food (50%; 4), language (75%; 6), holidays (63%; 5), respecting elders (50%; 4), going to temple (25%; 2), watching Chinese television/listening to Chinese music (37%; 3), and value systems (13%; 1) as representations of Chinese culture. Although the women went to great lengths to describe cultural practices that they believed reflected their ethnicity, the numbers indicated that degree of ethnic identification was unrelated to how often one exhibited these culture practices. The women claimed that participation in these activities reflected their ethnicity, but these external acts did not relate to internal perceptions. It may be that eating Chinese food, for example, was simply a part of every day life and celebrating holidays was sporadic, thus these acts were not indicative of how Chinese one felt. In short, exhibiting Chinese practices did not translate into having a greater sense of ethnic identification, but they did affect one's sense of being Chinese.

Finally, for many of the women, speaking Chinese demonstrated that they were Chinese; speaking Chinese made them feel Chinese and reflected their ethnicity. Forty percent (12/30) of the women believed that language signified a connection or tie to their culture, and thus their ethnic identity. They believed that language was culture, and culture was a part of their identity, thus speaking Chinese was a part of their identity. In addition, language enabled them to hold onto some of their roots by keeping the tradition and culture alive. One respondent (*Positive*) believed that speaking Chinese was important, "especially my parents emphasized speaking Chinese as really important. If you don't, then what happens when you go out into society and you are Chinese and you don't speak Chinese? They are going to look down on you. To me, I think it is really important." She added that language "is really important because it represents who I am, too; to carry on my parents, their history. And, I am proud to be who I am, anyways." Thus, speaking Chinese allowed the women to maintain their "native tradition and culture." One woman (*Identified*) asserted,

I guess if I don't speak it, I don't feel like, yeah, that I am not really Chinese. Like when you go into a restaurant and they see that you are and they hand you a Chinese menu and you can't read it, it is bad. I guess, I won't feel as Chinese if I didn't understand it and stuff. Like if I went to Taiwan and I didn't know how to speak it, it is like I look Chinese, but I am not.

Another woman (*Unimportant*) believed that speaking Chinese was important:

Yeah, I think so. Just so...I guess it is a part of my identity or whatever. It is important to speak my own language. Um...I think...it makes me feel more Chinese. To be able to speak Chinese---it's like bragging rights that you can still remember that you can speak it or whatever.

Thus, for some, knowledge of language was an important component of being Chinese. Specifically, 25 of the respondents spoke Chinese (two *Unimportant* respondents understood Chinese and three women only spoke English [two women in *Unformed*, one woman in *Positive*]). However, language ability did not directly correlate to degree of ethnic identity. In other words, greater fluency in Chinese did not translate into having a *stronger* sense of ethnic identity, although fluency appeared to affect one's sense of *having* an ethnic identity. That is, non-speakers or those less fluent felt excluded or uncomfortable in the presence of fluent Chinese speakers. The three non-Chinese speaking respondents indicated that they felt left out among Asian-speaking individuals. They believed that if they could not speak the language, then they were "out of the loop." This line of thinking may be true: one respondent (*Positive*) indicated that if she were to meet someone who did not speak Chinese:

I'd be like...like... I would think, "Didn't your parents teach you?" Or, "Didn't you want to learn?" 'Cuz most of them do regret that they didn't learn.

Q: Do you think they are less Chinese if they don't speak?

A: I think they are more Americanized. Even if they might hold Chinese traditions, they are still...it's not close enough. Language like, there is so much in the language, I guess.

Thus, it did matter to some Chinese-speakers if one could speak Chinese. Consequently, for a hand full of respondents, language appeared to be a measure of one's "Chinese-ness."

Though it was easy to chastise others for not learning Chinese, three of the women in the study (two *Unformed*, one *Positive*) were not given the choice to learn the language. One respondent revealed that her parents taught her English so that she would not have an accent and be "looked down upon" by others. She regretted not learning a second language, but she did not

have the option to learn Chinese. Although the Chinese speaking women indicated that speaking Chinese was not a key to peer-group acceptance, the women who did not have the language or did not speak the language fluently were made to feel uncomfortable, ashamed, and/or less Chinese to a degree. Whether one spoke Chinese or not, the respondents recognized that everyone was fluent in English and that speaking Chinese was not a requirement for functioning in the US.

In short, when one's parents emphasized the importance of one's Asian ancestry, one was more likely to be conscious of ethnicity as an aspect of one's identity and more likely to be ethnically identified. In contrast, expressions of Chinese culture (i.e., language, holidays, food, values and beliefs) appeared to simply represent means of ethnic expression and symbolism for the respondents. These cultural practices did not appear to directly affect the degree of their ethnic identification, possibly because they were viewed as aspects of their everyday lives (and in the case of holidays, occasional occurrences), but they seemed to influence the women's sense of having an ethnic identity.

#### Community Participation

Parental participation in the Chinese community would seem to set a tone of ethnic acceptance or rejection. However, over half (53%; 16) of the respondents' parents did not participate in the Chinese community. In addition, for those involved, participation commonly occurred through social events. Parents attended picnics, barbeques, and dinners to get acquainted with the community and/or they socialized with friends and relatives at Chinese churches and family associations. Shopping at Chinese supermarkets and eating at Chinese restaurants with their parents were also cited as forms of participation in the Chinese community. Overall, parental community participation did not appear to relate to the women's degree of ethnic identification.

However, two of the participant's parents were involved in the Chinese community in a more political capacity. One respondent's (*Positive*) father was the chairman of a group striving to make China a democracy and another's (*Identified*) father was on a Chinese American executive board organizing meetings and gatherings. These two individuals were more conscious of their ethnic self and group, whereas those whose parents were more informally involved maintained a similarly relaxed view of ethnic self. Thus, conscientious and formal



parental participation in the Chinese community seemed to affect the ethnic identity of respondents.

In contrast, the respondent's own social participation affected ethnic identification to a greater degree. Participation in ethnic clubs was the most frequently cited example of Chinese community involvement for the respondents. It appeared that those more ethnically identified were more likely to participate in an ethnic club.

To illustrate, for those respondents in the *Unformed* grouping, only one individual actively participated in an ethnic club and ran for office at that. She stated that "It is not fair that people who are different are labeled as less, so I think that is why I decided to [run for office]." In other words, she became an officer because she was tired of feeling excluded from ethnic groups and hoped to reach out to those who, like her, felt excluded. The others in this group stated that they did not participate in ethnic clubs because they preferred diversity, they did not want to "close themselves off to others and become clique-y," and because they felt uncomfortable around so many Chinese. One interviewee declared that she specifically did not participate in Asian clubs: "Oh no, I stay away from those on purpose. Even if it is an Asian American Christian Fellowship, I wouldn't want to go to that! No, because of the word 'Asian.' I want to go where it's diverse!"

Among the *Unimportant* women, seven were not involved and four were involved in ethnic clubs. The uninvolved women chose not to participate because they believed that people used the clubs primarily to socialize and "it really was a big social, hook-up club. I didn't like that. It was all about impressing people and image and hanging out." The remaining four participants indicated that they joined "to learn more about my Asian side. . . . To be part of a big Asian group to see what it is like, and also, learning experiences." In addition, they joined "just to help out the community, and it was fun, like meeting people and stuff like that."

Within the *Identified* grouping, three women were uninvolved and two participated in clubs. The disinterested individuals chose not to join because they perceived the clubs as too cliquish or "not their crowd." Of the other two women participants, one was a club representative and the other joined to meet other Asians socially. The representative specifically ran for office in an Asian umbrella organization because it was "more political. It is more about Asian awareness . . . . They talk about issues of being Chinese and being Asian and how it is,

and we talk about other stuff that normally [social clubs] wouldn't do. We are trying to be more Asian conscious.”

Lastly, five *Positive* women participated and three did not. They did not join because the clubs were “not what they were looking for” or because they felt that the organizations were either too Americanized or too Asian, so neither appealed. The other five club participants indicated that they joined either to socialize with other Asians (3) and/or because they were board member representatives (2). One respondent was heavily involved with two ethnic organizations. Regarding her reasons for participation in ethnic organizations, she stated:

I think part of it is because a bunch of them are my friends, a big part of it is because it was something that was small enough to work in and you could really get your hands into it and do something with it. It wasn't just focused on the political; it was focused a lot on cultural ties and stuff like that. It was also not exclusive. Whereas a lot of the Asian student associations on campus, they are exclusive—you have to be Asian to be a part of them (I have issues with that). I kind of feel like if you are trying to educate people, then to exclude them is very hypocritical.

As a whole, forty-three percent (13; See Table 2) of the women participated or became members for social reasons, to be around other Asians, and to learn more about their Asian side. They participated in order to “check out the club and to meet and hang out with other Chinese Americans. [Ethnic clubs] are an easy place to meet Asians.” Especially for the women who grew up in all white areas, they wanted to be a part of a large Asian group and to experience what it was like to be with other Chinese Americans. They imagined that they would meet people with whom they might share similarities because they were Chinese/Asian. Members also joined ethnic clubs for political reasons because some clubs were portrayed as encouraging Asian awareness. For example, members joined so that they could discuss the issues of being Chinese/Asian and to become more Asian-conscious.

A little over half of the women (57%; 17) chose not to participate in ethnic clubs. One woman believed that ethnic clubs were simply places for people to “hook up with people. [People are just] using their race. Many can't speak their own language. Sure they are Chinese, but do they know anything about their culture?” She believed that people were using their race as an excuse to meet people romantically as opposed to learning about and celebrating Chinese culture. Another woman believed that individuals who joined ethnic clubs were “party people. They say they are about Chinese awareness but it's just a bunch of people partying or going out

and doing things.” In addition, women indicated that they do not participate in ethnic clubs because they preferred diversity instead of perceived ethnic cliquish-ness.

In sum, eleven out of the thirteen club participants were more active members of ethnic clubs and the remaining women were either occasional participants or non- participants mainly due to time constraints and because they did not wish to join a social club simply to “hang out” with other Asians. In short, it appeared that those who were more aware of their ethnic identity and felt more positively about ethnicity were more likely to participate than not. That is, the greater the degree of one’s ethnic identification, the more likely one was to participate in an ethnic club.

In comparison to ethnic clubs where individuals joined voluntarily, the respondents commonly stated that enrollment in ethnic courses was due to university course requirements. However, they added that they were also interested in learning about Asian history and culture anyway. All of the participants in the *Unformed* and *Positive* groupings (See Tables 3 and 7, respectively) enrolled in at least one ethnic studies course, while less than half of the respondents in the *Unimportant* and *Identified* groupings enrolled in such courses (36%, 4; 40%, 2; See Tables 5 and 6). Thus, it did not appear that enrollment in an ethnic studies course directly correlated with one’s degree of ethnic identification. However, there appeared to be a U-shaped correlation in that those *less* identified were more likely to enroll and those *more* identified were more likely to enroll, as well.

For those who enrolled in such courses, most reported that they felt a connection to the history, the experiences, and to other Asians after they learned more about themselves and their parents’ origins. Many women stated that their perceptions of Asian Americans changed after taking ethnic studies courses. As they learned about the history and read literature on different groups, they realized that they shared similar, yet different experiences. They were similar in that society tended to lump Asian Americans together, and different in that each group was culturally different, with varying histories. They learned to appreciate the contributions Asians made to this country and to become more observant and understanding about other groups.

Not only did the women change their perceptions about Asian American groups, they also experienced changes in their perceptions of self after enrolling in ethnic studies courses. Some respondents began to think about their ethnic identities. For example, after taking the

class, they started identifying themselves as Asian American instead of just Asian or Chinese American. One woman (*Unimportant*) stated:

I think that [the class] was the first time I started identifying myself as Asian American. Instead of just being Asian, that was when...I think he had a couple lectures on that and he told some stories and that sort of made sense to me and that's when I started calling myself Asian American and Chinese American. . . . I guess when I say Chinese American/Taiwanese American, it kind of gives other people the idea that other things also have an influence on who I am besides being Chinese, like living in America and stuff like that.

Another respondent (*Unformed*) indicated that she became aware of the effects of stereotypes and how race/ethnicity affected people's perceptions and treatment of others after taking an ethnic studies course: the course "made me actually think a lot of my identity as being Asian. Maybe stereotypes that I have adopted that I have been unaware about. And if my race or ethnicity has anything to do with how other people treat me."

Overall, *Unformed* women (67%; 4; See Table 3) indicated that enrollment in ethnic studies courses triggered thoughts on their racial-ethnic identities. One respondent stated:

I never really thought about [my ethnicity] until I took that class and some of the books I was reading...it was like, 'Wow, these people feel/think the same way I do!' And that is weird for me especially some of the books I read because they were really in Chinatowns. Which I thought that that is kind of weird, that they would feel that way, but they were second generation already. . . . I realized that some of the ways people were acting in the books (but they are true books) like, they would purposely act like they wouldn't want to speak Chinese because they don't want to be stigmatized or something like that.

The majority (64%; 7; See Table 3) of the *Unimportant* respondents did not enroll in ethnic studies courses, but those who did stated that they were interested in learning about different cultures and developed a better understanding of Asian American experiences after taking the course: "After those courses I know a little bit more about myself and where my parents came from. Seeing other stories, I kind of understand. I never understood why there were more Japanese in Hawaii. After that class, it totally helped me understand."

Most (60%; See Table 3) of the *Identified* participants also did not enroll in ethnic studies courses except for two women. One indicated that after enrolling in the courses "it gives me a better understanding that I am...we took a survey and one thing I did learn is that I am sort of the middle to the spectrum—I am not completely white and I am not completely Chinese. I am sort of in the middle. " The other respondent stated that she enrolled in part "because it is part of by

breadth requirement. And I was also interested because I was already taking women's studies and that is part of who I am, but Asian American is also. So I wanted to take one of those and it was really interesting.”

Lastly, all of the *Positive* women expressed that they enrolled in ethnic studies courses because they were “really interested in learning about Asian Americans.” For example, one interviewee believed that enrollment in ethnic studies courses:

Answered a lot of my questions. Questions I didn't know about certain things. I didn't know the details of the Asian American experience and what not. I wanted to know the diversity of each other group . . . [each] has its own story. Like the Japanese in the internment camps, and the refugees in the community and all that stuff. I think, yeah. That was pretty much it. [Also,] it just kind of made me realize who I associate myself more with. I guess just the education kind of made me more aware of my surroundings and more aware of who I think I really belong to.

Similarly, another woman declared that she “signed up for the Asian American class because I wanted to learn about other ethnic groups. I know so much about Chinese and I have a lot of friends who are not Chinese, and so I want to know how they survived and how they lived and what they went through also.”

Thus, it appeared that enrollment in ethnic studies courses compelled *Unformed* women to contemplate their own ethnic identities, whereas for *Positive* women, enrollment was intended for increasing their understanding of other Asian American groups. Women in the *Unimportant* and *Identified* groupings were less likely to register, and when they did, they enrolled mainly to gain knowledge of Asian American experiences and to learn more about their ethnic selves.

## Asian American Presence

The presence and/or absence of Asian Americans in one's surroundings also influenced the women's sense of ethnic self. Over half of the respondents (53%; 16) said that they grew up in predominantly non-Asian environments with limited exposure to Asians and Asian culture. Twenty-seven percent (8) lived in predominantly Asian neighborhoods and 20% (6) lived in Asian-mixed communities. The presence and absence of Asian Americans clearly affected one's sense of ethnic identity, but in complex ways: ethnic difference was amplified for some living in white environments, while diverse environments enabled others to take ethnic differences for granted. In addition, the presence of Asians negatively affected some in that they believed the stereotypes of in- and out-groups while it afforded others the luxury of embracing their ethnicity.

Four of the *Unformed* women (67%) lived in non-Asian environments. The first woman in this group reported that she did not like to associate with Asians:

A: Over here, it's so full of Asians and they get on my nerves for some reason. I called my mom and told her, "Man, all these Asians piss me off." She said, "Are you prejudiced?" I said, "Yes, I am prejudiced. All these Asians. Oh. Man. Ohhhhhh.

Q: What do they do that annoys you?

A: That is a good question. A lot of things, like maybe the girls are too stuck up. Whenever I need to use the restroom, they are, like, hogging the mirrors. I just want to wash my hands, but no. They have to totally check themselves out and they will be there for hours. They are so focused on their image and everything. The guys, I don't know... this whole campus drives me nuts. It needs to be more diverse. I get along with people who are not Asian, more. I guess maybe because my neighborhood has other ethnicities besides Asians, I guess. Especially driving—all these mean Asians on the road.

Q: Do you think that growing up in a non-Asian dominated environment and then coming here, affects how you interact with other Asians?

A: Interact, interact, interact. I don't really interact with Asians very much. I try to avoid them as much as possible. But at least there are some nice, decent Asians in the world who are really nice, but I guess you have to get to know them and break the ice. But it's just like "Ugh!" They give me the heebee geebees.

The second respondent indicated that the lack of Asians in her community prevented her from developing a sense of connection to Asian people and culture: "I remember, like, being in high school where there were [ethnic] groups and I did not really have anyone else . . . around to identify like that." The other four women stated that functioning in a non-Asian environment or Asian/Asian-mixed community caused them to accept negative out-group perceptions. For

example, one participant experienced a change in ethnic perception after she moved from an Asian to non-Asian environment:

It wasn't too bad in elementary school because I went to elementary school in Chinatown. But when I went out to Junior high school, I went off to the Valley, which was predominantly Caucasian, so during that period, that is when I started feeling...resentment for being Chinese.

You know how there are different groups of Asian immigrants: the recent ones and the older ones? I guess I didn't want them to see me as a recent immigrant and not used to the American culture and so forth. I wanted them to perceive me as American as possible. So, that was probably one reason why I tried hard to reject my Chinese culture.

Q: Did you try to emulate white culture, too? As part of your rejection?

A: Uh huh.

Four of the *Unimportant* participants (46%) lived in diverse neighborhoods. Three of these women stated that the community was so diverse that ethnicity was taken for granted. For example, one woman declared, "The whole time I am here, I don't feel a really strong need to stress that I am an Asian American. I guess the community that I live in, people take it for granted that am. I just live with that." Another respondent expanded when asked, "Was there a point in your life when you realized that you were Chinese?"

A: No, I have always realized (laughs).

Q: Was there an incident maybe when you were younger when you realized that maybe 'I am not like my classmate?'

A: Most of the people I grew up with were people like me. The same background, yeah, essentially the same background.

In other words, others were either ethnically so similar to the respondents or ethnically so varied that one did not draw attention to ethnic differences.

The remaining six women in this *Unimportant* grouping lived in white neighborhoods or mixed Hispanic/Asian communities. Among the women raised in white neighborhoods (36%; 4), one became aware of her ethnicity because of in-group judgments, another identified according to perceived out-group labeling, another declared that she had not really given much thought to her ethnicity until the interview, and the last individual stated that she had "always known" that she was Chinese. Finally, two women (18%) were raised in Hispanic/Asian mixed communities. One believed that being Chinese had always been a part of her identity, while the other participant created her own ethnic label when she found acceptance among other Asian Americans:

Q: What point did you choose to say, "I am American Asian"?

A: When I moved to California [from Wisconsin]. I found out that there were more Asian people. It wasn't so much a label they put on me. It was, I made the label myself. It was being able to see and find other people of my race that would accept me and not have to try to be accepted by people not from my race.

Two *Identified* women (40%) lived in diverse neighborhoods. Both women indicated that their choice of identification depended upon the audience:

If you are with Caucasian people, they're real Americanized people and I would say Asian American because you can't hide that you are Asian. But you want to include that you are American. But around Chinese people, you have to say you are Chinese to make them sure that you are Chinese.

And,

I would either use Asian or... like, I prefer to say that I am Taiwanese, but sometimes... it depends on who I am telling. If someone asks what ethnicity I am and they are Asian, I will say Taiwanese. If they are anything else, I will say Chinese just because it is more common and in a way they are kind of the same.

Q: Would you also say Asian or would you prefer Chinese, in a more generic sense?

A: I would probably just say Asian if they wanted to know more specifically, they would ask and I would tell them.

Q: You might say 'Asian' first, and then more specifically 'Chinese,' and then even more specifically 'Taiwanese'?

A: Yeah.

This woman also indicated that she evaluated her degree of Chinese-ness by comparing herself to other Chinese:

I guess it would have to be high school, like junior year. I started making friends who were FOBs (Fresh Off the Boat) and we became friends and I would get so upset sometimes because they would go Karaoke singing and they would all sing Chinese songs. When the American song comes on, "Oh, it's Rachel's!"<sup>10</sup> They would write letters to each other and they would write the characters differently like with big bubbles and it would be really cute, but I couldn't read it because it was the newest kind of writing. I remember in that period, towards the end of junior/senior year, I really wanted to learn Chinese.

One woman who was raised in an Asian neighborhood had "always known" that she was Chinese because of her parents. Two participants lived in white/Asian mixed neighborhoods.

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<sup>10</sup> All names are pseudonyms to preserve anonymity.



The first woman declared that she had “always known” that she was Chinese. The other woman believed that the presence of other Asians helped her feel more positively about being Chinese:

In high school, everyone would be like this whole "Asian pride" thing. They would hang out with all Asians and they'd stopped being ashamed of being Asian and they'd start being proud of it.

Q: So, is that something you did? You kind of followed that path?

A: Kind of. I think so.

Q: So, you are saying that when you were little, you kind of wished you were white and then in middle school...?

A: In middle school, I don't think I really thought about it.

Q: What happened in high school that made you change? Was it just your friends?

A: I guess, yeah friends and people in high school. They were proud to be Asian. So I was like, "Yeah, that is true. I should be, too.

Lastly, in the *Positive* grouping, 63% (5) of the women lived in Asian communities. One woman indicated that she was proud to be Chinese in part because: “it has to do with a lot of Chinese Americans around me. If I was in a place where there weren't that many, I don't know—I'd feel really weird.” Three women believed that their sense of ethnic self became enhanced when their environment changed from Asian to mixed/non-Asian:

Before I went to high school, I went to a private school and I was pretty sheltered. I didn't know that there were differences; I thought that everyone was pretty much the same. Then, when I went to high school, it was a public high school, one of the realities came through because people would do things to other people and that is when I realized that I am different from some of the people. My school had Mexicans also and quite a lot of white people and so sometimes some of the groups would have arguments. That is when I realized that I am not entirely American. I am Chinese and it does influence how people see me and so on.

Two women (25%) grew up in white neighborhoods. One woman claimed that she had “always known” that she was Chinese because of her parents and the presence of Chinese friends, whereas the other woman was heavily influenced by the perceptions of the out-group and only after meeting other Asians did she come to accept her ethnic self and group. She stated:

Actually, I don't think that I noticed [that I was Chinese] until I moved . . . just because...well, I know that I am Chinese, but I don't think that it was really made apparent to me until I moved to a different environment just because I think the people there...it seemed like it was made a lot more apparent to me that I was Chinese because I was a lot more different than a lot of the students . . . where I

was growing up. [Consequently,] I guess I always felt that I didn't fit in just because I couldn't really relate to a lot of the white students.

Only after joining an orchestra did she “met some students there. A lot of the students there were Asian. I met ones from different high schools in the area and that is when I started noticing that there are a lot of cool Asians out there!” Then, she felt more able to accept her ethnic self and group. Lastly, one woman lived in a diverse neighborhood and hated Asians because they harassed her:

Q: Has there ever been a point in your life that you wished you weren't Asian American or Chinese American?

A: Probably during junior high because it was a hard time because there were other Asian Americans at our school and so I was being made fun of, I was kind of being picked-on.

Q: By the other Asian Americans?

A: Yeah. I thought, "Gosh, I hate Asians" because I was being picked on, I guess because I had the look of an Asian nerd, I guess you could say. I was a studious type and the one who gets the good grades. So I guess they would pick on my friend, and I felt "Gosh, I wish I wasn't an Asian. I just don't like Asians at all.

She indicated that coming into contact with Asian Americans on campus helped her to feel more positively about other Asian Americans: “I guess you could say since junior high, I thought there was only one set of Asians and that they are all like that, I guess. But when I went to college and there was such a diversity, that I was like ‘Whoa! We are all so different.’”

Comparing the effects of childhood community environments among the groups, regardless of whether the respondents lived in Asian or non-Asian environments, *Unformed* women (the most living in non-Asian neighborhoods) were likely to hold negative perceptions of self and group because they believed out-group perceptions. Among *Unimportant* respondents, diversity seemed to allow the respondents the option of not drawing attention to their ethnicity. The perceptions of others affected three of these respondents' sense of ethnic identity, but not to the extent of the previous grouping. Women in the *Identified* grouping all had exposure/contact with other Asians. Parental influence and the presence of other Asians helped them to identify more positively as Chinese. *Positive* women's sense of being ethnic became enhanced when they experienced changes in environment from Asian to non-Asian, in that their interactions with Asians helped them feel more positively about being ethnic.

## Race and Ethnicity

This next section focuses on the respondent's views on race and ethnicity. Perceptions of race/ethnicity, race relations and experiences with racism (subtle or blatant, recent occurrences and/or during childhood) did not correlate with ethnic identity. That is, all women recognized that racism existed in American society and most described experiencing subtle discrimination (70%; 21) and/or acknowledged that racism existed in American ideology and/or structure (53%; 16), but a greater awareness, knowledge, or experience with racism did not correlate with a greater degree of ethnic identification.

In general, respondents described race as biological, innate, and based on physical attributes such as skin color and facial features. They used the term "race" as a general term for people of certain regions or color. Ethnicity, on the other hand, related to values, practices, and culture; it involved how one carried oneself, who one "hung out with," and how one conducted oneself. While the majority of the women drew distinctions between the two terms, three respondents (2 *Identified*, 1 *Positive*) did not perceive a difference between them, instead, "they are the same" so they employed the terms interchangeably.

In addition, the women provided a number of different definitions to the term "Asian American." Many believed that "Asian American" was a vague, general term that incorporated many different Asian ethnicities. One woman (*Unformed*) defined Asian American as "a person from an Asian country or with Asian ancestors that grew up in America or lives in America." Another (*Positive*) described it as, "what makes someone Asian American or Chinese American is if you embrace both cultures." Another individual (*Unimportant*) stated that each ethnic group had their own background, so, if one identified as Chinese American, one indicated that one's ethnic background was Chinese, but that one was born here and was also American. Thus, a Chinese/Asian American held both Chinese/Asian and American values and traditions.

After providing definitions of ethnicity, the respondents were requested to express their opinions on race and race relations in America. All of the women believed that racism existed in American society. Most (67%; 20) were troubled by it, while others (33%; 10) claimed that it did not bother them too much. For example, one woman (*Identified*) stated that she might have experienced racial discrimination and that remarks had been made, but not to the extent that it really bothered her or upset her. Thus, among those who were not bothered, subtle statements had been made but because they had not experienced blatant racism, life was "okay."

Those who were bothered by racism reported that it “runs deep” and permeated our society. However, they believed that discrimination was not as blatant now as before. Instead, they experienced subtle forms of discrimination or subtle types of disrespect because of their yellow skin. For example, they received unfair treatment in supermarkets and slow service in restaurants. Seventy percent of the respondents reported experiencing such subtle forms of discrimination. More obvious forms of racism were also described by the respondents, including being spit upon and called racial epithets, having a friend pull up on her eyes and explain “this is why all Asians wear glasses,” and being told rude, racial jokes.

Although the respondents were more easily able to provide examples of individual-level racism, only a little over half of the women (53%; 16) recognized that racism existed on a broader scale and was maintained by the structure. For example, society was structured so that as minorities and as women, they would receive less (e.g., pay) and would only be able to reach certain levels (i.e., referring to glass ceilings). Thus, those in power were able to maintain the status quo because the social structure perpetuated inequality. Although the women’s views on racism varied considerably, they did not correlate with their degree of ethnic identification.

### Gender

The respondents were well aware of how women were depicted and treated in the larger society and within their own circles. Traditional gender roles were taught at a young age and reinforced through ideology, schooling and family. Some of these respondents accepted the conditions while others strove to break gender barriers and norms. Women in each group indicated that they categorized themselves as female (one *Unformed*, two *Unimportant*, one *Identified*, and three *Positive*). Although the women in the first two groups stated that they identified as “female,” this did not translate into a female identity. By “female” identity I mean categorizing oneself as female and finding importance in its meaning when asked, “How would you describe yourself?” In contrast, the women in the latter groupings stated that they were female, and this signified a female identity where gender represented an important aspect of their identity. That is, these women were cognizant of gender issues and identification as a female represented an empowering aspect of self. Thus, those with a greater sense of an ethnic identity were more likely to possess a gendered identity.

Within the *Unformed* group, the majority of the women experienced male favoritism in the home and heard sexist remarks in general, but they accepted gender prejudice and did not voice strong dismay at discriminatory structural and/or ideological conditions. Only one respondent specifically identified as female and believed that males were favored in the larger society, that women were stereotyped, and that it was important to attempt to “be the opposites of the stereotypes.” In short, *Unformed* women were aware of sexism, particularly as it applied within the home, but they did not voice strong opinions regarding gender (except for one respondent).

Similar to the previous grouping, *Unimportant* women also did not possess strong opinions regarding gender. For the most part, they did not believe that they had experienced sexism (aside from within the family). Although two women identified as female and attributed gender disadvantages to structural and ideological forces, gender differences “never really became a big issue. Even though males are paid more, I just accept it. That is it, the way it is.” Thus, like the other remaining respondents in this grouping and the *Unimportant* respondents, all of the women were aware of sexism, but they did not strongly believe that it affected them or their sense of self.

Within the *Identified* grouping, again, most women believed that they had not experienced sexism and if they had, they attributed any differential treatment to race. That is, if one had experienced any form of discrimination, they were more likely to assign it to race rather than gender. Only one respondent in this group identified as female and as a feminist, yet unlike the previous respondents, she held strong views regarding gender and sexism. For example, she believed that she experienced sexism all of the time (including sexual harassment), that women were viewed as objects and as less intelligent than men, that women were paid less in the work place, and that Chinese culture viewed girls as “worthless.” In addition, she stated:

I think it is kind of hard because of those presupposed notions that being Chinese you have to be a certain way and being a woman you also have to be a certain way. Like, it's like if you're a girl and you are smarter and better than a guy in something, they get either----their ego gets bruised. So I guess that's why some girls would rather be submissive because they don't want to upset the guy. ‘What if my boyfriend doesn't like me if I am better than him?’ I don't know if that is all women, but maybe Asians especially because Asian men compared to white men aren't seen as powerful, so I guess they have to look to the subordination of women to make them feel better. So we are shoved way down.

In short, *Identified* respondents were similar to the previous groupings with the exception of one woman who possessed a racial-gendered identity accompanied with strong feminist views and understandings of gender.

In the *Positive* grouping, most participants demonstrated a disinterest in gender and gender issues like the previous respondents. However, three of the women indicated a stronger and/or strong sense of possessing a gendered identity. Specifically, two women indicated that they were developing a gender identity and one woman possessed a strong gender identity. These women reflected:

Even though I am Chinese American and a woman, there are a lot of things that are expected of me and my family being just Chinese. I am expected to marry a Chinese guy and so on and I don't think that is what I want. In society, I'm just another person. I am not treated any special or any less.

I am also starting to develop more of an identity as a female. You are independent because you are Chinese and you have a lot of pride in that, at least I do anyway. But you are also oppressed because Asian society, American society, they all oppress...they are not very nice to women.

I go to an all women's college [and] I am in an environment where I am in a much smaller percentage of the community. You're almost much more aware that you are Chinese and not Korean—that you are Chinese and not white. You are aware that you are a girl and not a guy. Because of that, you become more aware of that aspect. It is not until then, that "How do you identify yourself?" Well, I am a Chinese American woman.

Although women in all groupings categorized themselves as females, the significance of its meaning as an aspect of self was greater for those more ethnically identified. In short, those more ethnically identified were more likely to be female identified.

## Race and Gender<sup>11</sup>

Even though all of the women were able to discuss race and gender issues, not all of the women were as articulate about race and gender intersections or identified with a racial-gendered identity. Women in all four groups displayed a range of awareness concerning race-gender intersections and consequently of their identities as Chinese American women. Specifically, three women in the *Unformed* group voiced stronger opinions regarding being Asian American and female and one woman in the *Unimportant* group possessed a greater consciousness of being Chinese and female. In addition, one *Identified* and five *Positive* respondents were aware of race-gender issues and articulated strong opinions regarding race-gender intersections. Thus, although women in each grouping voiced an awareness of race-gender intersections, those *least* and *most* ethnically identified were more likely to discuss the importance of race-gender intersections and possessing a race-gendered identification. That is, those women had a clearer sense of self as both a racial and gendered person; they not only thought of themselves as Chinese or female, but as a Chinese female. How the women were judged as possessing a race-gendered consciousness and identification depended upon how they answered the question, “How would you describe what it is like to be a Chinese American woman today?” If they indicated that being a Chinese American woman was a significant aspect of their identity, then they were deemed as possessing a racial-gendered identity.

Specifically, in the *Unformed* group, two individuals did not possess any clear thoughts on race and gender intersections. Another woman stated that only after recently enrolling in a course did she begin to give thought to the effects of race and gender on her relationships: “I have been thinking a lot about [race and gender] since taking that [course], especially when interacting with my husband who is white. We've only been married for two months and I am still learning a lot of that and I am still trying to figure out my identity as a wife and as an [ethnic] wife.”

The remaining three women in this group expressed the view that they were very conscious of being Chinese *and* female so that race and gender have “a huge influence on how I've learned to act and where I am.” For example, one woman stated that being a Chinese American woman,

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<sup>11</sup> Although most of the respondents recognized race and gender issues and interactions, almost none of the respondents discussed race-class interactions.

Has definitely been an identity struggle. [I am] dealing with three different issues, here: being Chinese, being American, and being a woman. I sort of feel like I have to prove myself to the world, that I am not the things... the stereotypes . . . That I am strong, I can do things on my own, I am capable of this and I do have my own opinions and that... on the surface, I am very Chinese, obviously, but inside, my values and my interests are very Americanized. At the same time, a big part of me wants to maintain the Chinese part of me.

One participant voiced that how women managed being female and Asian varied as well:

Trying to be Chinese American...and a woman...you may have no issues at all, may feel really comfortable in your skin, perfectly comfortable being ‘oh I am going to go to school, be a nurse maybe or whatever, and raise my kids. That is a great life for me. I am perfectly happy.’ Or you could have issues with people, forcing you into wanting you to be in that role; people trying to tell you, ‘No, you are supposed to be this, no, you are supposed to stay at home. No, you are supposed to be nice. No, you are not supposed to talk back.’ It depends on which road you want to take, I guess. It is not as open, in my opinion, you are more limited, but whether or not you notice it is up to you.

Within the *Unimportant* category, three women possessed an awareness of race-gender interactions but did not believe that it strongly influenced their identities. Two women viewed gender and race as two separate aspects of their identity. One interviewee possessed a racial-gendered identity but she attributed discrimination to gender rather than race because she “had not experienced racism.” Four women discussed the fact that there were similarities between being Asian American and female in that we have to “try twice as hard because not only are we Asian, but we’re women. Not only do you have to get over the stigma of being Asian, but you also have to fight the whole sexist thing, too.” Overall, these women did not possess strong race-gender identifications.

Three of the *Identified* women acknowledged that “you have to deal with being Asian and female” and that they were discriminated against based on their race and gender, but they did not possess strong race-gender identifications: ethnicity “is just as important as saying that I am a female. But then, it's, to me, the personality goes beyond that. So, to me, I am a female, I am an Asian American, it stops there. To me, actually, it is more interesting, more important to go into personality.”

One woman voiced the opinion that race and gender was:



A constant reminder everywhere: when you look in the mirror, you know that you're Asian, you're female. When you come to school, you know that you are looked down upon and so there is more of a competitive factor. We have to be stronger. There is more of a fight for the women than for the men. And especially since we are Asian, we're not on the peak of the hierarchy, so we have to show them that we can make it, too. There is a battle: a battle of wits, a battle of race; a battle of everything.

The other remaining woman in this group felt strongly about possessing a racialized-gendered identity and was exceedingly articulate regarding the intricacies of race-gender intersections.

She believed that she possessed a racial-gendered identity:

A: Yeah, but not separately. I don't think you can see it separately.

Q: So, you see them as intertwined?

A: Yeah.

Q: Who you are as a person is a Chinese American woman?

A: Yeah. Uh huh.

Q: Do you think they developed simultaneously or separately or...?

A: I think everyone learns their gender first because ever since you were born, your parents treat you differently according to what your gender is. Our parents totally impose it on us. We learn it and then we end growing up thinking that is what –who we are and what we're like. I don't know if that really is because it gets imposed on us so much that we internalize it. And we think that it comes from us. Racial-wise, I don't think I knew really until I got to school and I saw that there were people different from me. But then, I don't think in kindergarten I noticed. But in elementary school you notice.

Q: That is when the kids made fun of you guys?

A: Yeah. And you get exposed to more things and you're like 'Oh, there are other things out there. I think gender is more---you learn it more fundamentally.

Within the *Positive* subgroup, three women were conscious of possessing a racial-gendered identity but it did not “dominate” their lives: “Being a Chinese woman? I don't see anything with it now. It has never really crossed my mind.” The second interviewee stated:

I don't think about it. These kinds of things, I mean, I never really much care [to be] this specific. To me, I am a woman, I am Chinese, I am American. That is cool. Going into it...it never really mattered much to me. It is important, but then to me I don't really care, honestly, talking much about it unless we have to and that is when we do. Otherwise, I'm okay.

Q: Do you see them as two separate entities or do you see them as being one?

A: I think they are two separate, but then they can be combined as one because anything can be combined. They are two separate things and when you combine it, it can work just as well as two separate things.

Three women believed that being Chinese and female were equally important and contributed similarly to their identities. If they experienced discrimination, it was equally likely to be due to race as it was to gender. Their sense of race and gender influencing their identities was significant: “both of them equally contribute to who I am.” Lastly, two women believed very strongly in their identities as Chinese American women. One woman said that “I can’t identify myself without saying that I am Chinese and female. They are aspects of who I am.” She believed that “you fight a world that is predominantly male-dominated and not only that, but also a society where it is primarily white.” These respondents conveyed that their identities were intertwined aspects of self. The other participant stated regarding her racial-gendered identity,

Q: Overall, how important is your ethnicity? Is it really significant, significant, just there....?

A: I would say right now, it is significant but I think later on, it's going to be a big part because I am so interested. I am still looking. That is why it is not as significant as it would be as if I were more educated about Chinese American women or even Chinese Americans.

Q: Do you think that being a woman is equally important as being a Chinese American or do you think one is more important than the other or do you think they are intertwined?

A: I think they are intertwined. I have to search as being a woman and as a Chinese American woman.

Overall, ten women saw race and gender as important connectable aspects of self. Although women in all groupings recognized race-gender intersections, there appeared to be a U-shaped correlation in that those *least* and *most* identified were the most articulate about race-gender intersections. It might be that *Unformed* respondents were beginning to contemplate not only their racial-ethnic identities, but other identities as well, whereas *Positive* women were simply expressing their awareness of other aspects of their identity.

### Summary

These women demonstrated a range in choice of ethnic identity and degree of ethnic identification. Factors affecting degree of identification included parental upbringing, parental community participation, respondent participation in ethnic clubs, and the presence or absence of

Asians/Asian Americans in their surroundings. Parental upbringing appeared to positively influence the women's appreciation of their ethnic group and identity. Thus, the more a respondent was exposed to the idea of being Chinese, the more likely she was to be ethnically identified. Active parental participation in the Chinese community and active respondent participation in ethnic clubs seemed to relate positively to the degree of one's ethnic identification. That is, those whose parents were more actively involved in the Chinese community or who themselves were active participants in ethnic clubs were more likely to possess a stronger degree of ethnic identification. In addition, the presence or absence of Asians/Asian Americans in their environments affected the women's sense of ethnic identity in complex ways. For those living in the absence of Asian Americans, ethnic differences were often accentuated. These women felt a need to disassociate themselves from other Asians because they believed out-group stereotypes, and thus were less likely to identify ethnically. In contrast, women living in Asian concentrated and/or diverse settings were afforded the luxury of embracing their ethnicity, if not taking their ethnicity for granted because they resembled the surrounding population. However, the presence of Asian Americans could also negatively affect the perceptions of ethnic self and group, again, because one accepted the negative perceptions of the out-group or because one compared oneself to other Asian Americans and believed that she did not "measure up." Conversely, the presence of Asian Americans could also positively affect one's sense of ethnic self and group, particularly for those coming into contact with Asian Americans for the first time because they discovered commonalities and shared experiences. Lastly, those who felt more positively about their ethnic group and self were more likely to demonstrate a stronger gender identity.

Enrollment in ethnic studies courses and identification with a race-gendered identity reflected a U-shaped relationship to degree of ethnic identification. The respondents *least* and *most* ethnically identified were more likely to be enrolled in an ethnic studies course and more likely to be race-gendered identified.

Factors that were unrelated to ethnic identification included expressions of Chinese culture, language ability, and views/experiences with racism.

It appeared that parental upbringing and the presence/absence of Asian Americans in one's community were most clearly associated with the strength of one's ethnic identification. It is possible that parental upbringing provided the foundation for one's overall outlook and

position regarding ethnic group and self. In other words, if one's parents presented Chinese culture in a positive manner, then one was more likely to embrace it, whereas if one's family did not take pride in their ethnic heritage, one was less likely to ethnically identify. In addition to parental ethnic nurturing, the presence/absence of Asian Americans in one's surroundings provided a support system for one's ethnic identity. That is, how one viewed ethnic self and group was sustained by the viewpoints of others (Asian American or otherwise). In short, one's degree of positive or negative identification depended upon the viewpoints of others in one's local context.

The next chapter discusses the processes that lead to the women's ethnic identifications. As foreshadowed in this chapter, symbolic interactionist approaches were highly evident in the women's understandings of self.

## CHAPTER IV:

### APPLICABILITY OF IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL-PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORIES

This section evaluates the utility of existing racial-ethnic identity development models as they apply to Chinese American women. While the previous segment addressed the extent to which Chinese American female college students identified as Chinese American and/or pan-ethnically as Asian American, this section concentrates on the processes which led to their current identifications. For simplicity's sake, the experiences reported in the interviews are compared to a generic ethnic identity development model, as described earlier: 1) individual identity is based on a lack of knowledge of her own ethnic culture and instead she identifies with the dominant culture, 2) an encounter or series of encounters triggers the individual to rethink her beliefs regarding her ethnic culture and white culture, and 3) she then explores and immerses herself into her ethnic culture while rejecting white culture and beliefs. Lastly, 4) she learns to appreciate and find pride in her ethnic identity and strives to identify with other oppressed groups.

In addition, I evaluate the interviews against the four broader sociological and psychological approaches to identity. As a reminder, the symbolic interactionist approach emphasizes the contextual aspects of identity; people's self conceptions (according to Mead, McCall and Simmons, Stryker, and others) depend, in part, on interactions with others. Identity emergence depends upon the interactions we have with others and how we believe others perceive us. Thus, identity manifestation is situational depending on who we encounter. In contrast to sociological approaches which examine individual-level identifications of self, psychological models focus on collective-level identities where identities are formed through social comparisons with and categorizations of an individual via her group membership. That is, identity emerges when an individual perceives herself as a member of a group and compares her group positively to other groups (Tajfel). Or, she derives an identity based on whether her past experiences and stereotypical notions match others' within her group (Turner). Like sociological approaches, psychological models also suggest that identity becomes salient and varies by social context.

In general, the interviews suggest that Chinese American women's ethnic identity is much more situationally dependent and primarily affected by the views of others (83%; See Table 5), secondarily through group categorizations (77% and 43%), and not very likely to emulate developmental models (27%).

### Ethnic Identity Development Models

Overall, only eight women's experiences reflected developmental models (5 *Unformed*, 1 *Identified*, 2 *Positive*; See Table 5). Five out of the six women in the *Unformed* grouping demonstrated possible patterns of developmental models. One woman appeared to be in the Pre-Encounter stage of ethnic identity development models because she identified with white culture. She indicated that she identified as "basically Asian American even though I don't identify with the culture" because she was "surrounded by Mexicans and Caucasians." She added, "Actually, just growing up, I always knew distinctions that 'yeah, I am Asian,' but it doesn't really matter. . . . Growing up in school, elementary school, there was a black person or a white person; I guess I am Chinese, an Asian person kind of thing." She believed that "most people can't tell if you are Chinese or this or that so if you're just Asian, most people stereotype with groups: this is a white group, this is a black group, this is the Asian group" so she too adopted this form of identification. She did not believe that she was the typical Asian "because I don't speak my own language and I don't know much about my culture and I never went to Chinese school or anything like that."

Another individual appeared to have lived most of her life in the Pre-Encounter stage where her ethnicity did not play a significant role in her life and she had limited knowledge of Asian history or culture: "I remember when I was really little being one of the only Asian kids and I did not even know that I was Asian because everyone else around me, we didn't see those distinctions." She indicated that regarding her ethnicity in general, "It is a little confusing. I've never really thought about this that much." She seemed recently to have entered the Encounter stage of ethnic identity development in that taking a course on Asian American Film and Literature triggered thoughts about her identity as an Asian American woman: "It made me actually think [about] my identity as being Asian. Maybe stereotypes that I have adopted that I have been unaware about. And if my race or ethnicity has anything to do with how other people treat me." The course caused her to challenge previously accepted beliefs about stereotypes,

**Table 5: Sociological-Psychological Theories Present in Women's Accounts**

| <b>Grouping/Theory</b>    | <b><u>Symbolic Interactionist</u></b> | <b><u>Tajfel's Social Identity</u></b> | <b><u>Turner's Self Categorization</u></b> | <b><u>Developmental Models</u></b> |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <b><u>Unformed</u></b>    |                                       |                                        |                                            |                                    |
| 1                         | x                                     | x                                      | x                                          | Pre-Encounter                      |
| 2                         | x                                     |                                        | x                                          | Encounter                          |
| 3                         |                                       | x                                      | x                                          | Latter Stage                       |
| 4                         | x                                     | x                                      | x                                          | Latter Stage                       |
| 5                         | x                                     | x                                      | x                                          |                                    |
| 6                         | x                                     |                                        |                                            | Latter Stage                       |
| <b>%</b>                  | <b>83%</b>                            | <b>67%</b>                             | <b>83%</b>                                 | <b>83%</b>                         |
| <b><u>Unimportant</u></b> |                                       |                                        |                                            |                                    |
| 7                         |                                       |                                        | x                                          |                                    |
| 8                         | x                                     |                                        | x                                          |                                    |
| 9                         | x                                     |                                        | x                                          |                                    |
| 10                        | x                                     | x                                      |                                            |                                    |
| 11                        | x                                     |                                        | x                                          |                                    |
| 12                        | x                                     |                                        | x                                          |                                    |
| 13                        |                                       |                                        | x                                          |                                    |
| 14                        | x                                     |                                        |                                            |                                    |
| 15                        |                                       |                                        | x                                          |                                    |
| 16                        | x                                     |                                        | x                                          |                                    |
| 17                        | x                                     |                                        |                                            |                                    |
| <b>%</b>                  | <b>73%</b>                            | <b>9%</b>                              | <b>73%</b>                                 | <b>0%</b>                          |
| <b><u>Identified</u></b>  |                                       |                                        |                                            |                                    |
| 18                        | x                                     | x                                      |                                            |                                    |
| 19                        | x                                     |                                        | x                                          |                                    |
| 20                        | x                                     |                                        | x                                          |                                    |
| 21                        | x                                     | x                                      | x                                          |                                    |
| 22                        | x                                     | x                                      | x                                          | Latter Stage                       |
| <b>%</b>                  | <b>100%</b>                           | <b>60%</b>                             | <b>80%</b>                                 | <b>20%</b>                         |
| <b><u>Positive</u></b>    |                                       |                                        |                                            |                                    |
| 23                        | x                                     |                                        |                                            |                                    |
| 24                        | x                                     | x                                      |                                            | Latter Stage                       |
| 25                        | x                                     | x                                      | x                                          |                                    |
| 26                        | x                                     |                                        | x                                          |                                    |
| 27                        | x                                     | x                                      | x                                          |                                    |
| 28                        |                                       | x                                      | x                                          |                                    |
| 29                        | x                                     | x                                      | x                                          | Latter Stage                       |
| 30                        | x                                     |                                        | x                                          |                                    |
| <b>%</b>                  | <b>88%</b>                            | <b>63%</b>                             | <b>75%</b>                                 | <b>25%</b>                         |
| <b><u>Total %</u></b>     | <b><u>83% (25)</u></b>                | <b><u>43% (13)</u></b>                 | <b><u>77% (23)</u></b>                     | <b><u>27% (8)</u></b>              |

Note: "Latter Stage" refers to exhibiting characteristics of later stages of developmental models

race/ethnicity, and gender. However, she did not appear to have entered any other stages because she had yet to explore or immerse herself into her ethnic culture.

It seemed that the next respondent was further along the path to developing an ethnic identity: first, she did not identify with Chinese culture in that she claimed: “I never thought anything about my identity whatsoever until I literally came to [college]. There, she began to think about her identity after enrolling in a course about Chinese experiences in America: “I never really thought about it until I took that class and some of the books I was reading...it was like, ‘Wow, these people feel/think the same way I do!’” Enrollment in the course also compelled her to:

Start thinking about my own life and wow .... I never even wanted to get to know some of the Asian people (I keep saying Asian, but I am sure they are all Chinese, actually) at my school .... I haven't pieced it all together yet. I think it has to do [with] something about it. And like me not learning any Cantonese or not knowing more Cantonese past the third grade level, it has to have something to do with the fact that I didn't like who I was. I wished like I was like my white friends. I think I remember I wanted to have colored eyes (laughs).

She then identified as a Chinese American, aspired to get politically involved in the community, and began to develop a greater appreciation for her Chinese self and culture. She declared that “I am doing everything... I am desperately trying to make up for what I feel like I missed out. Like, I am going to go to China, which is just bizarre. I would never have done it [before]. I would have wanted to go to Europe if I was going to do an education abroad program. [And,] I am secretly learning Mandarin with my dad.”

Another participant growing up did not want to be perceived as Chinese, but rather as a “mainstream American.” Then, after attending college, she enrolled in a course that compelled her to rethink her existing beliefs about self and Asians. She then perceived commonalities with other racial/ethnic minorities and accepted ethnicity as an aspect of self. However, in contrast to ethnic identity development models, she believed that her gender identity also figured prominently in how she viewed herself in addition to her racial-ethnic identity, and her choice of ethnic identification was situational in that how she identified depended upon her audience:

I usually say I'm Chinese and then I get confused because I am Taiwanese. So, depending on who I am talking to. If I am talking to another Asian, and there will be a distinction in their head between Chinese and Taiwanese, then I will say Taiwanese. But if that doesn't mean anything to them, I will probably say whatever happens to come out of my mouth. Usually I say, ‘I am Chinese’ because Asian is such a broad term, it doesn't really mean anything.



The next woman's path to ethnic identity followed Kim's model rather closely in that she was initially "okay" with being Chinese (in contrast to the other four developmental models in which the individual identifies with white culture). When she attended a new school and came into contact with whites, she developed "resentment for being Chinese" and rejected those things Chinese. She stated that "I guess when I was growing up in elementary school, I was totally enthusiastic about [cultural events]. It was all around me. It was just normal but then after junior high school, it dawned on me, 'That is lame. I don't want to go to an all-Chinese cultural event. That is so Chinese.'" Only after going to South Africa and comparing her experiences and background to other Americans did she identify as an ethnic minority and her Asian/Chinese American identity emerged:

When I started there [in South Africa], all the students were American [and] I was the only Chinese person there. That really hit me. For orientation, there were 100 Americans there and they were basically upper/middle-class Americans-- white Americans. There were a couple Hispanics and a few blacks. That just totally hit me. I was considered an American student but at the same time, I felt so distant from these Americans.

Q: In what way?

A: We were talking about their childhood and the things they did and what their parents do and I just realized, "God, I was not raised with that lifestyle at all. I did not live that childhood at all." They did not go through the same struggles like I do. And I just started realizing that I am not as American as I thought I was in comparison to them. So definitely after that, I started realizing that I am so Chinese (laughs)! It was definitely an eye-opener.

Upon returning from South Africa, she enrolled in an ethnic studies class to "learn a little bit more about myself." Lastly, she indicated that her racial and gender identities were intertwined aspects of self.

In the *Identified* grouping, one respondent's ethnic identity could also be interpreted as following developmental models. To reiterate, in grade school she held a negative perception of ethnic self: "I remember when I was little, I didn't like being Chinese. I guess back then, kids were mean and they were stupid. I think in elementary school, kids, I guess that is when they are first aware of differences in ethnicity and stuff, as well as gender. So then, you don't feel like you really fit in with the white kids." Following an introduction to Asian American students who were proud to be Asian (an encounter), she began to rethink her existing beliefs regarding ethnic self and group: "in high school, everyone would be like this whole 'Asian pride' thing. They would hang out with all Asians and they'd stopped being ashamed of being Asian and they'd start

being proud of it.” She believed that her ethnic identity had gone from negative to positive because “you get more open-minded the older you get. Kids are pretty narrow-minded: they saw Asian people, lump us all together and make fun of it and that made me feel embarrassed.” She gained a new perspective about her ethnic self and group, identified with other minority groups and eventually blended her ethnic identity with her feminist and Christian identities.

Two *Positive* women’s experiences reflected ethnic identity developmental models. Like the last *Unformed* participant described above, she was initially “okay” about being Chinese, until she moved to a predominantly white environment where “I always felt that I didn't fit in just because I couldn't really relate to a lot of the white students. I tried my best to try to fit in . . . . [However] it seemed like it was made a lot more apparent to me that I was Chinese because I was a lot more different than a lot of the students.” Her contact with whites and her belief that she did not fit in caused her to develop negative perceptions of self and group. Following an introduction to Asians, her perceptions changed again to an acceptance of ethnic self and group: “I started noticing that there are a lot of cool Asians out there.” She added, “Being Chinese...I think...I am very proud of my heritage.”

The second individual’s identity loosely followed ethnic identity development models in that she initially experienced an alienation from Asian Americans and wished that she was not Asian:

Junior high . . . was a hard time because there were other Asian Americans at our school and so I was being made fun of, I was kind of picked-on . . . . So, I guess, they would pick on my friend and I felt "Gosh, I wish I wasn't an Asian. I just don't like Asians at all."

Fortunately, she studied abroad in Spain and at the time believed that:

I didn't really think of myself as Chinese or American. There was no reason for me to say I am Chinese or American because I felt like I was an individual not as a race or ethnic. When I went to Spain, I experienced a lot of questions like, “Oh, where are you from? What are you?”

Following these ethnic inquiries (an encounter), she began to rethink her previously held beliefs, developed more positive attitudes about her ethnic self, and realized that she was Chinese and American. In addition, she met Asian Americans on campus who were different than her junior high school classmates and this changed her opinion of Asians Americans as a whole. Thus, meeting new people abroad and at college affected her perceptions of ethnic self and group. In addition, she indicated that she viewed herself as a Chinese American woman.

These women's experiences fit ethnic identity developmental models in that at some point in time, they held unformed views of ethnic self and/or negatively perceived their ethnic group and self. Through enrollment in an ethnic studies course, contact with other Asian Americans, and/or studying abroad, these women's views towards self and group changed so that they were more accepting of group and self. Only a minority of the total sample had experiences that followed the general outlines of developmental models. In fact, most of the *Unformed* women (83%; 5) had developmental model experiences, but these experiences were rarely mentioned in the other groups. It is possible that the concentration of developmental experiences in this group reflected the fact that their parents either had limited discussions about racial-ethnic differences with their children, or they imparted negative views regarding their Chinese heritage. Without a foundation on which to build a positive view about their ethnic group and self, these women were more likely to identify with white culture and believe dominant group beliefs, and thus their ethnic identity experiences were more likely to reflect developmental models.

#### Symbolic Interactionist Approach

Although developmental models did not seem to apply well to the sample in general, Symbolic Interactionist approaches appeared to have the greatest fit with the women's sense of ethnic self and group (88%; See Table 5). Among the *Unformed* respondents, almost all (83%) of the women saw themselves as they believed others perceived them. For example, Stryker's Identity Theory might have explained the lack of importance of ethnic identity for the respondent (#1 in Table 5) who expressed a low degree of ethnic exploration and thus held an unformed perception of ethnic self. It is likely that she was not committed to her ethnic identity because her neighborhood and friendship networks did not bring her into contact with those who emphasized ethnicity, thus she did not occupy a social position that required her to think of herself or behave accordingly.

More commonly, out-group and in-group perceptions affected the women's sense of ethnic self. One respondent stated that she identified as Asian because the out-group could not distinguish differences among ethnic groups (and neither could she). That is, she believed that the dominant group generically labeled her as Asian American, thus she accepted and adopted this label. In addition, because her neighborhood and social networks limited her exposure to other Asians, she identified with the dominant group and this hampered the emergence of an ethnic identity.

Another woman stated that she felt alienated from members of the American community because they did not look upon her as one of them. She claimed that although she was American, she looked Chinese and was perceived as not totally American. In addition, she did not feel like she belonged to the Chinese community because she believed that the Chinese community perceived her as very Americanized. Feelings of not fitting in or belonging to the Chinese community caused her to draw away from her ethnicity. Thus, she believed that both American and Chinese cultures rejected her, and these assumptions were based on her perceptions of how *she* thought *they* viewed her.

Likewise, another participant began to question her degree of ethnicity when she wondered how other Asians perceived her. Specifically, she cited going to an all-Asian church for the first time and feeling uncomfortable and self-conscious and wondered “Are they looking at me? Are they talking about me?” because she questioned whether they were judging her authenticity as a Chinese person. She added that after coming to terms with her ethnicity, “I even applied for Chinese scholarships and stuff, but I guess...I don't know. I always thought they [other Chinese] didn't like me because I wasn't Chinese enough. I know that sounds weird, but I don't know.”

Consistent with a symbolic interactionist approach, *Unimportant* women believed that they were perceived and labeled as Asian, thus they adopted this identity. Women in this subgroup often mentioned how the perceptions of whites and Asians affected their ethnic identification. For example, one respondent assumed that people thought that she was Asian American: “I grew up in a predominantly white neighborhood all my life so I just assumed that people thought I was Asian American. I never said, ‘I am Chinese American.’ I didn't really think about it that way.” Thus, she never identified herself as Chinese American because others labeled her as Asian American.

One participant reflected upon an exchange with an INS agent: the agent asked if she knew what a “Banana” was and then laughed at her. She expressed feeling neither Chinese nor American: “I am not American because I have Asian features, but I am not really Chinese because here is this guy who is Chinese and he is totally rejecting me straight out.”

Likewise, another individual discussed the effects of the in-group. She believed that she was not accepted into the “Asian clique” in high school and this affected her sense of being “Asian enough.” They did not view her as being “Asian enough,” so she defined herself as less Asian and more Western. She felt that the label “Asian American” had been imposed on her by

the Asian population: “you were born here so you are Asian American, you are more Western, so you are more Asian American” (as opposed to being viewed and labeled as more authentically Asian).

*Identified* respondents also cited perceptions of both the out-group and in-group as affecting their sense of ethnic identity. To illustrate, one respondent realized that she was Chinese during an interaction between two white girls who made fun of the shape of her eyes: “I have been made fun of my eyes before . . . . They would ask me, ‘How come your eyes are so small?’” This exchange appeared to facilitate her awareness of being Chinese in that she was conscious of the fact that they defined her as different and she accepted their label.

Another respondent believed that her sense of ethnic self changed over time (from Chinese to Chinese American and then to American):

I grew up in a high school that was predominantly Chinese. Pretty much all my friends were Chinese, maybe some Filipino, maybe a couple white, a couple black, but pretty much Chinese. I guess I felt more in tune with the Chinese culture, like back in Hong Kong or China and Taiwan, but ever since I moved to college, I felt like there was a 360. I felt like I was more, sort of say, more Chinese American and less of a Chinese identity. Maybe it's because I don't really have that interaction with my parents back at home. So coming here and interacting with Asian Americans or even more white, it has changed. I went abroad last year, to England. That was even more a completely different experience of . . . identifying myself as American. So, to me, the trip to England did change a lot of how I view myself.

When I moved to England for a year, that is when I felt like it really changed. I guess, sort of, being introduced to a completely different type of western culture. I have never been exposed to such a western culture before in my life until I went there and obviously there, I attracted mostly Caucasians from all over Europe. The identity for me there was American. Obviously I was Chinese, they knew I was Chinese but they always asked, ‘Where are you from?’ ‘I am from America.’

Her changes of identification seemed to be influenced by her interactions with others (first her parents, then Asian American/white students, then Europeans). Her sense of ethnic identity appeared to reflect those held by people with whom she came into contact: 1) when she was with her parents and Chinese classmates, she felt Chinese, 2) in the presence of Asian Americans and whites, she identified as Chinese American, and 3) she categorized herself as American when Europeans labeled her as such.

Two of the women in the *Positive* grouping expressly discussed the effects of changes in environment and thus interactions with others as affecting their sense of ethnic identity. For

example, one respondent moved from a diverse environment to a pre-dominantly white environment that did not embrace diversity, and this induced her to grapple with being different because of her ethnicity. She knew that she was Chinese but it was not apparent until she moved to a different environment where others made it obvious to her. She believed that they did not accept her because she was Asian, and thus she adopted an Asian identity. Consistent with Symbolic Interactionist approaches in that individuals are capable of employing choice, not simply determined by the definitions of others, she reacted to dominant group rejection and labeling by embracing her group.

The other respondent was originally from Hawaii, and she perceived herself through a dual lens with respect to Hawaii and to the Mainland. She claimed that “race is not as significant in Hawaii as is being a local versus a haole” (that is, from Hawaii or not...a.k.a., everyone else or whites); thus, in Hawaii she saw herself as local or haole. Whereas on the mainland, she believed, race seemed to be more important. Thus, she viewed herself as Asian or Chinese there because that was how others viewed her. Her sense of race/ethnicity was heightened once she arrived on the mainland where “you’re either white, black, Hispanic, or Asian. I have to fit into one.” On the mainland, the perceptions of others dictated the lens through which she saw herself.

These women’s experiences suggested that identity emergence was situational in that ethnic identification depended upon the social environment and changes in the social environment. That is, how one ethnically identified could reflect adopting out-group labels, believing in-group perceptions that one was “less than Asian,” or choosing to identify because others rejected one’s ethnicity. In addition, changes in environment compelled some to re-evaluate their perceptions of self when they came into contact with others. These experiences were overwhelmingly most common (83% of the sample, 25/30) and did not depend on the woman’s degree of identification.

In general, the women’s ethnic identities were less likely to be formed through group comparisons. However, some of the women’s experiences were described to illustrate that inter- and intra-group comparisons did affect ethnic identity.

#### Tajfel’s Social Identity Theory

Overall, inter-group comparisons were most often described by *Unformed* (83%; See Table 5), *Identified* (60%), and *Positive* (63%) respondents. To reiterate, positive and negative

in-group comparisons are the key aspects of identification in this theoretical approach. There were three ways in which group comparisons helped to shape the women's identities: 1) some women had no Asian groups available or salient in the social environment with which to identify, so they did not derive an ethnic identity, 2) other women viewed Chinese or Asians as possessing negative group characteristics so they did not identify as such, and 3) some women saw Chinese or Asian groups positively, so they identified with the groups. In addition, negative or positive perceptions of one's in-group were achieved through adopting the perspectives of whites *or* embracing the perspectives of Asians.

Ethnic identity emergence was hampered when Asians were unavailable or not salient in one's social environment. For example, among the *Unformed* women, one woman indicated that there were limited ethnic others for her to identify with because she grew up in an all-white area. It may have been that she did not have an ethnic identity because she did not believe that there was an ethnic group to join. Without the presence of an ethnic group, she had no group to compare to, therefore no group from which to derive an identity: "I remember, like, being in high school where there were . . . groups and I did not really have anyone else who was [Chinese with] Indonesian [background]. . . . But I remember there weren't many [Chinese] Indonesians around to identify like that." However, even if presented with a group of Chinese with Indonesian cultural background, she did not perceive that identifying with an ethnic group would have positive consequences. She indicated that "a lot of my friends who were in these different groups, they started becoming prideful in the group they identified with, that they seem to be really closed to other people. That was something I was aware of that I didn't want. I am glad that I didn't latch onto a group saying 'okay, this is my identity.'" Thus, even if presented with the opportunity, she stated that she would not join an ethnic group because of its negative trait (she did not want to be "closed to other people"). Overall, for this respondent, it is possible that she did not have an ethnic identity because she did not perceive possible group membership with others of a similar history, experience and culture.

Women indicated that at times, they did not wish to be grouped with other Asians because they viewed them as having negative group characteristics. For example, one respondent (*Unformed*) stated that after going to a new school and coming into contact with whites, she began to view herself and her group in relation to whites. She negatively perceived her membership, so she attempted to present herself as "American as possible." After going to South Africa, she compared her experiences and background to white Americans and her identity

shifted from “individual” to “representative of Asian Americans.” Her identity changed to that of Chinese American when she reflected on and acknowledged her “Chinese” upbringing in comparison to white Americans.

Another woman (*Identified*) echoed similar sentiments in that during elementary school, “the white kids made fun of Asians.” Consequently, she felt like she did not fit in with the white kids and wished that she was white because “everything you see is white.” She felt invisible compared to her white classmates and as a result, she did not like being Chinese. Later, the environment at her school changed; the Asian students had “Asian pride” and because they were proud to be Asian, she supposed that she should, too. She stopped feeling ashamed and instead became proud to be Asian. Her perception of self changed because an Asian group emerged that provided positive aspects to her identity. Consistent with social identity theory, she sought membership into this group which contributed positive aspects to her ethnic identity.

Relevant to Tajfel’s theory, one individual in the *Unimportant* grouping mentioned the presence of an Asian clique in high school that created group distinctions and formed a group identity by comparing itself to other groups:

I didn't hang out with them because I wasn't Asian enough. That is one reason why people were separated because they weren't as Asian as them. They tended to become more friendly and more accepting if you were more Asian. . . . They separated themselves out. I imagine that part of it is that because they hang out with other Asians, it's one way of separating, but in a way they are so "Asian," other groups will stay away from them.

Thus, the respondent based her sense of ethnic self on comparisons of her group (which happened to be composed of an ethnically diverse group of individuals) to that of the Asian clique.

For other respondents, they saw Chinese/Asian groups positively, so they identified with the groups. For example, one woman (*Unformed*) stated that she was ashamed of being Chinese until she went to college. There, she came into contact with other Chinese, lived with Asian American roommates and developed friendships with these individuals. In time, she discovered that she related to Asian Americans and “became more culturally aware and learned to accept and embrace being Chinese as opposed to being ashamed of it.” Comparing her experiences with other group experiences, she discovered that she shared a sense of background with other Asian Americans and perceived an Asian/Chinese identity.



Three *Identified* participants indicated that group comparisons were made mostly by Asians. One woman's Chinese peers drew a distinction between American-born and non-American born Chinese. Although she viewed herself and others as "Asians," because she was foreign-born, she was not perceived as like them and therefore different. Her own in-group (other Chinese children) defined her to be in the out-group (non-American born Chinese). She, in turn, created her own term to produce feelings of inclusion for herself and the other foreign-born children. Another respondent similarly stated that in grade school, her Chinese American classmates differentiated between American-born and foreign-born Chinese and because she fell into the latter group, she self-identified as a "Chinese from Hong Kong." Again, group comparisons were made, but these women derived an identity based on their more specific group membership and joined the group that accepted them.

Tajfel's theory also applied to the emergence of a gendered (and racialized) identity for one respondent (*Positive*). She believed that she became "aware" that she was Chinese (and not white) and female (and not male) in college. This appeared to be because she moved from a predominantly Asian concentrated area to a predominantly white populated area, and because she attended an all-female college. Tajfel's theory was applicable in the emergence of her ethnic and gendered awareness because she began to view herself as a member of a group and derived an identity through group comparisons (i.e., Asian/white; female/male).

In short, lack of diverse context inhibited group comparisons and thus one's ability to derive an identity, awareness of group stereotypes and characteristics incurred social comparisons and group rejection, and changing context (e.g., going to college, travel abroad) caused some women to change their comparison groups and thus their self conceptions. In addition, it appeared that those less ethnically identified were more likely to not identify either because Asian groups were unavailable or salient in the social environment or because they viewed them in a negative light, while more ethnically identified individuals were more likely to identify with Asian groups because they viewed them positively.

#### Turner's Self Categorization Theory

Overall, intra-group comparisons were often described by the respondents *Unformed* (83%; See Table 5), *Unimportant* (73%), *Identified* (80%), and *Positive* (75%). To recap, this theoretical approach posits that an individual's identity emerges when she compares her past experiences and stereotypical notions to others' within her group. First, the individual uses a

particular self-category to define herself based on past and present experiences (“relative accessibility”). Then, she contrasts herself against others to determine if the social category fits (“comparative fit”). Lastly, she matches herself with stereotypical notions of the group and assesses if she fits those stereotypes (“normative fit”).

Turner’s theory applied to Five *Unformed* participants. One respondent appeared not to identify ethnically because she did not have “relative accessibility” to the category of being Asian American/Chinese American. She stated that, “I don't really identify myself [ethnically] because it is such an obscure idea to me as to what that is. . . . When I fill out those forms, I check Asian American. I don't know really what that entails to adopt that as my identity. I think it is a definitional label.” That is, her past experiences and current expectations indicated that the category of “Asian American” did not apply to her. She also lacked “comparative fit” because she did not have others against whom to contrast herself to see if the label applied. Lastly, she argued that she did not fit the stereotypical notions of an Asian American/Chinese American female, thus she also did not have “normative fit.”

Two women believed that different aspects of their identity became salient depending on the context. For example, one respondent stated:

When I am with friends that are Chinese, I would say I am Chinese. Then, we could bond. I think most of the time when I say those terms, I think, I don't know if it goes for most people, but it is to belong to some group. Really. To identify myself in some way. If I were to say I am completely American, I wouldn't feel like I belonged there because I would be leaving out things. If I were to say I am Chinese, I would be leaving out the other side. So I think when I usually say those things, it's for the feeling of belonging to something. If I was with Asian friends, I would want to bond with them in that way so, "We're Asian American!" (laughs) and with Chinese people, I would say I am Chinese.

Thus, consistent with Tajfel’s idea of identity as having value and emotional significance, she ethnically identified in order to “bond” with others and she deliberately chose certain ethnic terms to “belong to some group and to identify” herself in some way and to encourage feelings of belonging to something. And consistent with Turner, her identification shifted from the standpoint of an individual to a member of a group, and it changed categories depending on which group was present.

For the other *Unformed* respondent, enrollment in an ethnic studies course further influenced the emergence of her developmental ethnic identity in that she began to think about

being Chinese, and the commonalities she held with other racial/ethnic minorities, (i.e., her normative fit).

Respondents in the *Unimportant* grouping also suggested that enrollment in ethnic studies courses and associating with Asian Americans increased their understanding of their ethnic identities. For example, one participant stated that after taking an ethnic studies course, she identified with other Asian American groups' experiences. She felt more connected to Asian Americans as a whole after having read their accounts and thoughts. After taking the classes, she realized how much her experiences reflected those of a Chinese and Asian person. Another respondent agreed and stated that after enrolling in an Asian American Studies course, she began identifying as Asian American and Chinese American instead of just Asian or Chinese because "it gives other people the idea that other things have an influence" on her besides being Chinese, such as living in America. She identified with other Asian Americans because "we have similar backgrounds and similar stories." Again, these statements are consistent with Turner's theory because she perceived a shared identity with other Asian/Chinese Americans.

Another respondent asserted that she was less "white" now that she had Asian friends. She believed that by associating with Asians, she was more aware of Asian culture and being Asian. She experienced an increased awareness of being Asian in that she identified less as an individual and more as a representative of Asian Americans. In other words, as she spent more time with Asian Americans, she perceived herself as more of a member of the Asian American group.

Four *Identified* respondents believed that ethnic self categorization created "bonds" with others. According to one respondent, asking about one's ethnicity filled in someone's background and created a cultural connection, or better understanding of one another. She believed that ethnic identification was a means to define oneself based on shared experiences and commonalities.

Another woman's choice of racial/ethnic terminology depended on the audience because she wanted to "fit in." For example, she described herself as Asian American, American, and Chinese. Particularly when she was in the presence of Chinese people, she identified as Chinese. Around whites, she identified as Asian American because "you can't hide that you are Asian but you want to include that you are American."

Four *Positive* women's ethnic identities were influenced by the presence of other Asian Americans. For example, one respondent did not view herself as representative of other Chinese

Americans because she was more “traditional.” She compared herself to members of the Chinese American ethnic club on campus and believed that they did not speak to her because she was different from them. She asserted that she did not do the same things or respond in the same ways as they did even though they were all Chinese Americans. She viewed them as “typical American-born Chinese who know they are Chinese but don’t think about tradition or what people went through as Chinese.” Even though she perceived herself as more culturally Chinese than them, she participated in the club because she wanted to be around other Chinese from her same generation. She also expressed that she felt at home on campus because there were so many Asian Americans. She believed that “we all went through similar family situations, we all understand each other.” Her experiences are consistent with Turner’s theory in that she shifted into a shared identity with other Chinese Americans at times depending upon the “fit” of the situation and comparison group at hand.

In sum, lack of diverse others limited a cognitive shift into a shared group identity, the presence of ethnic others compelled some women to identify ethnically in order to “bond” and/or “fit in,” and enrollment in ethnic studies courses increased the ethnic awareness of some respondents as they perceived shared commonalities (normative fit) with other Asians/Chinese. The lack of diverse others and enrollment in ethnic studies courses were less commonly described by the respondents, while the presence of ethnic others were stated numerous times as affecting their ethnic identifications. In addition, it did not appear that degree of identification was related to the various factors described above.

### Summary

Overall, respondent’s experiences in the *Unformed* grouping reflected the broader sociological and psychological approaches to identity emergence. These women’s identity experiences were diverse, dissimilar to one another, and reflected aspects of all theoretical models. No one theoretical model or combination of models seemed to characterize their identity experiences. Nevertheless, it appeared that more women in this subgroup had experiences that reflected ethnic identity development models than in any other grouping (five participants compared to three combined in the other three subgroups), in part because these individuals initially (and/or currently) possessed an unformed and/or relatively negative perception of ethnic group and self. In addition, each of these respondents seemed to be at different stages (one each in the Pre-Encounter and Encounter stage, three in latter stages of the

models). Although three women were categorized as exhibiting latter stage characteristics of developmental models (i.e., they blended their Asian American identity with the rest of their identities; greater appreciation for ethnic group and self), they still held relatively negative or newly formed positive attitudes about their ethnic selves. Thus, a criticism of Ethnic Identity Development Models is that one could be exploring and transforming one's sense of ethnic self but this does not automatically translate into a positive sense of ethnic self. In other words, the progression from negative identification to positive takes time, if it occurs at all. Although only eight cases reflected developmental models, the interviews suggested that there were variations in experiences that developmental models did not seem to consider.

*Unimportant* identified women were more likely to demonstrate that their ethnic identities were affected by the perceptions of others (73%) and group membership associations (73%) as opposed to group comparisons (9%). In addition, none of these women appeared to follow developmental models because they did not regard their ethnic self and/or group negatively, either now or in their pasts.

All of the individuals in the ethnically *Identified* subgroup cited the perceived influence of others as affecting their ethnic identities (100%). They were also more likely than the *Unimportant* grouping but less likely than the *Unformed* women to believe that group membership affected their identities (80%). Only one of these individuals seemed to have followed a path described by developmental models and she was placed in a latter stage of the models (20%).

Like the *Identified* subgroup, *Positive* respondents' experiences were likely to demonstrate aspects of all of the broader theories (Symbolic Interaction 88%; Tajfel 63%; Turner 75%), including two respondents who appeared to demonstrate later stages of developmental models (25%).

In conclusion, among the latter three subgroups of women, Symbolic Interactionist approaches (83%) and Turner's Self Categorization theory (77%) more often applied to women's ethnic identity emergence than Tajfel's Social Identity theory (47%) and Developmental Models (27%). Developmental models did not apply as well to these women's experiences possibly because their parents positively influenced their views on ethnicity and because these women were in the presence of others who supported their ethnic identities. In short, the women's accounts of ethnic identity emergence suggested that ethnic identity was situationally or

contextually fluid and affected most significantly by the imagined perceptions of others and how one defined oneself in relation to others in her group.

## CHAPTER V:

### CONCLUSIONS

This study sought to determine to what extent Chinese American college-aged women ethnically identified and the process or processes that lead to their identity formation. I found that the women could be placed in four groupings of ethnic identification based on the degree to which they identified: Unformed, Unimportant, Identified, and Positive. The two most frequent categories were Unimportant (37%, 11) and Positive (27%, 8) (See Table 4).

The overall purpose of this study was to examine the applicability and utility of various theoretical approaches to ethnic identity formation. This study sought to establish whether Chinese American women followed the stages described by ethnic identity developmental models or more actively constructed and negotiated their identities. It appeared that these women's identifications were highly contextually dependent and much more complex than suggested by developmental models. In addition, it seemed that the models did not apply as well to Chinese Americans as compared to other minority members (for whom the models were initially developed) in that only eight women's identity experiences (27%) were evaluated as following developmental models. Furthermore, two-thirds of the women indicated that they held multiple (e.g., ethnic, gendered, Christian, etc.) identities, an occurrence that ethnic identity development models seems to ignore. In fact, for some women, other identities represented much more significant aspects of self than their racial-ethnic identities. Specifically, the respondents appeared to struggle to reconcile their Asian/Chinese and American identities in a way that other racial-ethnic groups (i.e., black Americans) did not. In short, developmental models did not seem to apply to my sample, in general.

Women who held *Unformed* ethnic identities maintained relatively indistinct and/or newly formed ethnic identities formerly accompanied with unformed and/or negative perceptions of ethnic self and group. These women attributed their perceptions of themselves and their group to limited contact and exposure to Asians/Asian culture and changes in their environment from Asian to non-Asian. These women's racial-ethnic identities reflected aspects of all four of the broader sociological-psychological theories as well as some aspects of ethnic identity developmental models.

*Unimportant* ethnic identity participants composed the largest group of women in this study. These respondents regarded their racial-ethnic identities as insignificant yet constant aspects of self. These women attributed their ethnic self-identification mainly to the perceptions of others and to their intra-group comparisons.

*Identified* women's racial-ethnic identities factored more prominently as a characteristic of self. These women derived their self-conceptions from the perceptions of others and making inter/intra-group comparisons.

Lastly, the *Positive* Ethnic Identification grouping composed the second largest number of women. These women possessed a positive view of ethnic self and group, and all but one of the women was aware of holding an ethnic-gendered identity. Like the group above, they attributed their pride in being Chinese to the perceptions of others and inter/intra-group comparisons that they made themselves.

To reiterate, ethnic identity development models did not seem to apply well to these women. It appeared that broader social-psychological and sociological theories better described their identity formation. The respondents indicated that the imagined perceptions of others and/or one's sense of shared group identity affected their views of racial-ethnic self more so than an unfolding series of steps from identification with the dominant group to identification with one's own group. While some women followed the developmental path (See Figure 1), the ethnic identity formation of the majority of the women involved a less sequential and internal discovering process.

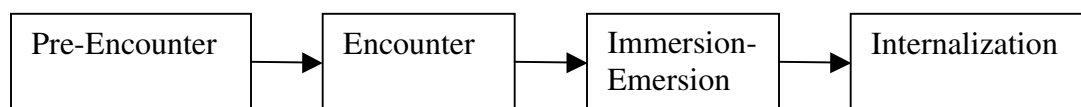


Figure 1. Path Diagram of Ethnic Identity Development Model

Most importantly, out-group and in-group labeling affected their sense of ethnic identification. In addition, identity formation was not necessarily linear or progressive in nature, but often situational and contextually dependent (See Figure 2). For instance, women would switch identification according to the group at hand both for the purposes of enhancing belonging and to “fit in.”



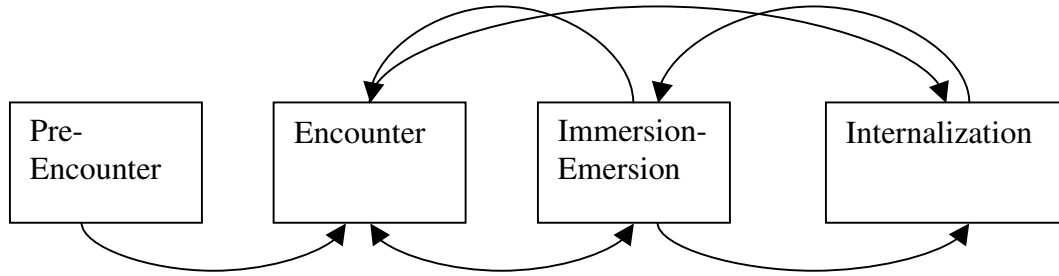


Figure 2. Path Diagram for Contextual Model

It is possible that ethnic identity developmental models were less suitable for these women because the models were created for other minority members who were living in a time period of greater racial-ethnic power conflicts and oppression. In contrast, these participants live in an atmosphere in which diversity is “embraced” or at least on the surface, race relations are harmonious. In addition, the stereotypes of Asian Americans as a “model minority,” and the status of Asian Americans (as a group) relative to other people of color, may make ethnic identity more positive than for other people of color. The majority of the women grew up in diverse settings where ethnicity could be accepted and “taken for granted.” Those living in a predominantly white setting were given the option eventually to meet and associate with other Asian Americans because they attended a predominantly Asian American, ethnically diverse campus. Thus, if they chose, they could have developed an ethnic identification or remained indifferent to their racial-ethnic group and identity. All in all, twenty-nine out of the thirty women said that they did racially-ethnically identify, to varying degrees.

In short, the two key findings of the study were that ethnic identity developmental models applied to very few Chinese American women and that symbolic interactionist approaches and self categorization theory were far more applicable in describing the identity emergence depicted by these women.

### Limitations of the Study

The theoretical generalizability of the study is limited to public university, undergraduate, young adult, mostly never-married, middle and upper class Chinese American females living in southern California. The limited sample may have affected the main findings of the study in that the ethnic identity of women not living in southern California (or in a non-Asian populated area) might be more strongly affected by the views of dominant others. These women might be more inclined to identify with white culture and therefore more of the women's experiences might reflect developmental models. Also, with respect to those women significantly affected by the presence of Asian Americans on campus, if those women were to be interviewed at a later date and in a non-Asian context, their ethnic identities might be less significant or salient. That is, because of limited interactions with ethnic others, the importance of enacting a particular aspect of self might be decreased. The relative absence of Asian Americans also speaks to social identity and self categorization theories in that if one does not have an ethnic group with which to compare her background and experiences, then she would not be able to derive an ethnic identity, and thus the significance of her ethnic identity might decrease once she leaves an Asian American populated area. Thus, we might expect the degree of ethnic identification in a white-dominated context to differ from the study's results. In general, if the sample were more varied, the findings might indicate different percentages of respondents in *Unformed*, *Unimportant*, *Identified* and *Positive* groupings. The study was also limited because only Chinese American women were interviewed and the findings cannot be theoretically generalizable to Chinese American men. Any further conclusions concerning the racial-ethnic identity formation of Chinese American women can best be accomplished through the random sampling of Chinese American women of varying ages, generations, demographic locations, and social classes. However, there has been limited exploration into the topic of the ethnic identity of Chinese American women. Thus, although limited in scope, this study was warranted because empirical research has dealt mostly with other ethnic groups and does not differentiate between the experiences of men and women. Consequently, this study's findings regarding identity formation adds to ethnic group, gender, and social-psychological/sociological identity formation literature.

## Future Research

Given that ethnic identity developmental models did not apply well to most of these women, probably because the models were created for other minority members, particularly during a time period of greater social upheaval, future research pertaining to these specific groups could establish whether developmental models are still valid even for those groups for which they were first elaborated. Current literature regarding racial-ethnic identity development models does not appear to examine the sequential process of identity development, but rather the placement of individuals into particular stages within the models, and the interplay of attitudes and behaviors within each stage. Current literature suggests that the racial-ethnic identities of blacks (Lilly and Neville 2000, Cokley and Helms 2001) are complex and multifaceted. Like the women in this sample, black college students varied in their degree of ethnic identification and their identity formations reflected the perceptions of their own racial-ethnic group, the dominant group, and self. The literature seemed to focus less on the sequential process of identity emergence, and more on the complexities of racial-ethnic identity itself. In addition, the literature has focused on how to best measure the intricacies of each identity stage within the models (Cross et al. 2001, Vandiver et al. 2001).

As noted earlier, the majority (80%) of the sample was raised in southern California with a high population of ethnic others. Studies of Chinese American women living in other regions of the country should be conducted to determine how the presence or absence of large percentages of minority others affects their ethnic identification. That is, the ethnic identity of women with limited contact with minority others, particularly Asian Americans, may more likely reflect ethnic identity developmental patterns, whereas those women living in more Asian American concentrated areas may indicate that their identities are less likely to fit developmental models. In other words, the applicability of racial-ethnic developmental models may depend less on the racial climate, and more on the relative density of ethnic groups in the local population. Overall, I expect that most women's experiences will indicate that broader social-psychological and sociological theories better apply to their identity formations. Specifically, identity formation is much more situational and contextually dependent than suggested by developmental models and is affected most often by interactions with others, and to a lesser degree through inter-group comparisons. More precisely, community composition may affect identity emergence more so than racial climate because today's individuals are less likely to experience an overtly hostile racial atmosphere, whereas living in some form of ethnic community (white or

otherwise), and coming into contact with ethnic others, is a given. In short, ethnic identity is more likely to be dependent on interactions and comparisons with others within one's local population.

Finally, future research should follow up on my respondents, to examine if, and how, their identities change over time. Particular attention should be paid to the period after they leave the campus environment, especially for those moving (back) to a non-Asian environment. It seems likely that because the perceived perceptions of others and current group membership so highly affects ethnic identification, further changes in one's environment will also alter one's sense of ethnic self.

## Interview Guide

Purpose: To examine the racial-ethnic identity formation of Chinese American women.

### Background

Year in college

Major

Age

Single

Where born

Hometown

Did you grow up in an ethnic neighborhood? Can you describe it to me?

Tell me about how your family came to America.

While you were growing up, were your parents actively involved in the Chinese community?

Do you feel that speaking Chinese is important?

In your opinion, how important is speaking Chinese relative to being accepted by your Asian peers?

### Identity

How would you describe yourself?

If you think of your ethnicity as an aspect of who you are, how important is it compared with the other aspects of yourself?

When describing yourself, do you include your ethnicity? Do you prefer to describe yourself as Asian American or Chinese American? For what reasons? What does it mean to you? Has it changed over time?

Do you remember the first time that you were consciously aware of being Chinese or Asian American? How old were you? Could you walk me through that experience?

Thinking back over time as a kid and then as a teen, did the importance of being Asian/Chinese American become greater at some time and less important at other times in your life?

Do you feel that the label of Asian American has been imposed on you in any way?

Do you have a picture of the typical Asian American/Chinese American? What is it?

Do you find yourself identifying with other Asian Americans/Chinese Americans? Can you give me an example?

Has there ever been a point in your life that you wished you were not Asian American?

### Race and Ethnicity

Have you ever been treated unfairly because you are Chinese/Asian? If yes, what is your earliest recollection of experiencing discrimination because of your race?

Can you describe your most recent or your most memorable experience for me?

Probe: institutional or individual level discrimination?

Is it a common occurrence for people to ask or comment on your ethnic background? Can you describe an incident to me? How did it make you feel and how did you respond?

Do you think a hierarchy exists among racial/ethnic groups? Do you draw a distinction between race and ethnicity?

Do stereotypes exist for Asian Americans? Can you describe them for me?

## **Gender**

Have you ever been treated unfairly because you are female? If yes, what is your earliest recollection? How did the incident make you feel? Have you experienced any discrimination since?

Probe: institutional or individual level discrimination?

Do you think that males are favored over females in the larger society and in Chinese culture?

(What is your perception of Chinese culture?)

How would you describe what it is like to be a Chinese American woman today? How does it differ from being a Chinese American man and/or non-Asian man or woman?

How do you think Asian American men perceive Asian American women? Other non-Asian men?

Do stereotypes exist for Asian American women? Can you describe them? Do you feel that Asian American women reinforce these stereotypes? Do you reinforce these stereotypes?

## **Dating**

Let's talk about dating now. Does your ethnicity play a part in who you date, or maybe who your parents want you to date?

Is it important to you or your parents that you date/marry someone Chinese? Asian American? Non-Asian?

Do you feel that there are differences between dating someone Chinese versus Asian American? In what ways?

What is your dating preference?

Who do you think would date you?

## **College/Outside of College**

Do you have any ethnic involvements in college, for example, friends, clubs or classes? How about outside of college?

What is the most common ethnicity of your friends? Does this differ from your group of friends from high school and adolescence? How?

Are you currently involved in any Asian American *clubs*? Can you describe for me why you did or did not join?

Are you currently involved in any other clubs or organizations (predominantly white or non-Asian)? Can you describe for me why you did or did not join?

Have you taken any Asian American/ethnic studies *courses*? For what reasons did you enroll? Did this change your perspective on: 1) Asian/Chinese Americans? 2) Other things related to Asia/Asian Americans?

Are you involved in the Chinese *community*? What is your definition of a Chinese community?

Are you involved in any cultural practices that reflect your ethnicity? (e.g., attending Chinese Language School, ethnic music/dance, entertainment, history/culture, etc.)

Could you estimate the percentage of Asian Americans on campus? Does this affect the climate at school?

Have you ever traveled to Asia? If yes, did this change your perceptions of 1) Asians or things related to Asia? 2) Yourself? If so, how?

## **Closing:**

If you were going to give advice to other Asian/Chinese American women about being Asian/Chinese American, what would it be? Any other advice?

Is there anything you expected me to ask you that we haven't talked about yet?

You have been so helpful, thank you for your time. Do you know of anyone else I could talk to about this topic?

Could you tell her about this project and see if she is interested in speaking with me?

**VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY**  
**CONSENT FOR RESEARCH STUDY**

Title of Project: Chinese American Female Identity

Principal Investigator: Janelle Lee, M.A., Graduate Student of Sociology

Project Supervisors: Peggy Thoits, Ph.D., Professor of Sociology  
Yvonne Newsome, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Sociology  
at Agnes Scott College, Atlanta, Georgia.

Name of Volunteer: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

The following information is provided to inform you about this project and your participation in it. Please read this information carefully. Any questions you may have about this will be answered by your interviewer. Please feel free to ask any questions you may have about the study and/or about the information here.

NOTE: It is important that you understand that your participation in this study is totally voluntary. You may refuse to participate or choose to withdraw from this study at any time without negative consequences.

NOTE: If you should have any additional questions about this study, your participation in it, or about your rights as a research subject, you may contact: Janelle Lee at (714) 978-6023; Peggy Thoits (615) 322-7542; Yvonne Newsome (404) 471-5249 or Vanderbilt University IRB (615) 322-2918, fax (615) 343-2648.

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The reason for doing this study:

Very little is known about how Chinese Americans perceive their identities as Chinese Americans or about how these identity perceptions change as a person becomes an adult. Even less is known about how Chinese American WOMEN think about being both Chinese American AND female. The purpose of this study is to explore the understandings that Chinese American women have of how their ethnicity and gender affect each other and how these perceptions have changed over time.

The procedures to be followed in this study:

I will ask to meet with you at a convenient time and place. I will ask you a series of questions about your racial/ethnic experiences and perceptions, your opinions about gender and stereotypes, and your perceptions about your ethnic identity and how these may have changed over time. With your permission, I will tape-record the interview. The interview will be transcribed, for later study. All tapes and transcriptions will be secured in a locked file to which only I and my supervisors will have access.

Date of IRB approval:

Date of IRB expiration:

I will assign an I.D. number and code name to your tape. Your true name will not appear on the tape. I will use your code name in the typed transcript and I will change unique details about you so that your identity will remain as confidential as legally possible. Tapes, transcripts, and project reports will never identify you by your true name.

The length of time that you will be involved in the study:

I will ask to talk to you for 1 to 1 1/2 hours.

Discomforts, inconvenience, and/or risks to you:

I do not anticipate that you will be made uncomfortable, inconvenienced, or put at risk. If you are uncomfortable about answering a question that I have asked, I will gladly skip that question and go on to others.

Direct benefits to you:

You will not benefit directly from this study. However, many people enjoy talking about themselves and passing on what they have learned from their experiences. Many times participants discover that the interview provides an opportunity to discuss and explore things that are important to them.

Your rights, welfare, and privacy will be protected in the following ways:

(1) All data obtained about you during the course of the study will be kept as confidential as legally possible and accessible only to the researcher and her advisors on this project.

(2) Should the results of this project be published, you will be referred to only by number or by a pseudonym (like "Alice A." for Jane Doe).

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I have read this consent form and I understand that the procedures to be used in this study and the possible risks, inconveniences, and/or discomforts that may be involved. All of my questions have been answered. I freely and voluntarily choose to participate. I understand that I may withdraw at any time.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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I give permission for this interview to be tape-recorded.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of IRB approval:

Date of IRB expiration:



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