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TECHNOLOGIES OF RACIAL FORMATION: ASIAN-AMERICAN ONLINE IDENTITIES

A Dissertation Presented

by

LINH L. DICH

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

September 2012

English

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TECHNOLOGIES OF RACIAL FORMATION:
ASIAN-AMERICAN ONLINE IDENTITIES

A Dissertation Presented

By

LINH L. DICH

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DEDICATION

To my supporters in this journey, my family, and my friends who are like family.

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I would like to thank my advisor, Donna LeCourt, for her guidance, mentorship, and patience in this journey. Her timely encouragement and support have been critical to my thinking and development as a scholar. I would also like to thank Haivan Hoang and K.C. Nat Turner for their many contributions throughout my writing process. They have been and will remain excellent intellectual models in my life.

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I am indebted to the participants who have made this study possible. Their generosity and courage continues to be a source of inspiration. Their stories change lives and I hope this study can help others recognize the power of writing to transform, for the better, oneself and thus the world we all inhabit. They taught me that we see and come to understand ourselves in each other.

I am most thankful to my family, close friends, and partner. This project was a collective effort and their love, support, and belief in me are the invisible pillars to these pages.

ABSTRACT

TECHNOLOGIES OF RACIAL FORMATION:
ASIAN-AMERICAN ONLINE IDENTITIES

SEPTEMBER 2012

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My dissertation is an ethnographic study of Asian-American users on the social network site, Xanga. Based on my analysis of online texts, responses to texts, and participants' discussions of their writing motivations, my research strongly suggests that examining digital writing through participants' complex and overlapping constructions of their community and public(s) can help the field reconsider digital writing as a site of Asian-American rhetoric and as a process of constructing and transforming racial identities and relations. In particular, I examine how community and public, as interconnected and shifting writing imaginaries on Xanga, afford Asian-American users on this site the opportunity to write, explore, and circulate their racial and ethnic identities for multiple purposes and various audiences. Race and ethnicity, as many scholars argue, are shifting and unstable concepts and experiences. Therefore, writing about race and ethnicity may be done best in environments that can accommodate complex and multiple acts of racial and ethnic formations.

While my research demonstrates how participants "want to be heard" on their own terms, whom they imagine (or want to imagine) as listening/reading significantly informs their writing. That is, participants' conceptions of their writing goals and their audiences are multiple and simultaneous—these racial and ethnic writing acts are often inflected by intersecting issues of

gender, sexuality, class, culture, and intergenerational tensions—and, hence, traditional writing genres that limit such goals, audiences, and complexity do not always reflect how writers conceive of their own racial and ethnic experiences and their writing in the world. This study, then, examines Xanga as a flexible writing *ecology* that affords Asian-American users opportunities to compose their continuously transforming and complex racial and ethnic identities across multiple niches of representational sites and, specifically, in public and community spaces.

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CHAPTER 1

NEW TECHNOLOGIES AND ASIAN-AMERICAN IDENTITIES

Introduction

"… if we keep doing what we have always done, albeit doing it with technology, we will keep getting what we have always got."
– Elaine Richardson, "African American Women Instructors: In a Net"

I start with Richardson's epigraph because it reflects what I believe is one of the field's most pressing issues with new technology and language practices: how racial inequities continue to be maintained with new writing technologies. Although the field of composition and rhetoric has taken strides since its premature and celebratory reaction to a nascent World Wide Web, we remain struggling to comprehend the role race plays in this digital context and, conversely, how emerging technologies inform race and racism. Therefore, I read Richardson's passage as a caution against promulgating the status quo of racial inequities, but also as an important insight into how the field can interrogate the intersection of race and technology more rigorously. Richardson, then, prompts me to ask, exactly "what have [we] always done" that will be repeated with emerging technologies? How do we as scholars and teachers engage with writing technologies so that they are not employed in maintaining old structures of race and racism in new forms? These questions offer me a starting point for my project because understanding "what we are doing" is important to understanding what we ought to do and where we ought to go as a field. Given the ubiquitous nature of digital and emerging technology in our teaching and learning environments, I argue that we need to comprehend more fully what

is happening with race in cyberspace if we want to understand how race and language are functioning in our classrooms.

My project interrogates the relationship between digital writing and race by examining whether social network sites (SNSs)[1] provide Asian-American users the space and technology to construct their identities in more complex and transformative ways than previously considered by the field. It may be evident that SNSs allow researchers unimaginable access to writing practices traversing modalities, genres, and contexts. But how users bring together viral videos and texts to create a blog topic, for example, or how online audiences read meaning from such texts are less understood or theorized by scholars, especially when it comes to the construction of users' racialized identities. That is, we may have looked at digital writing and race, but very little research has moved past "looking" to rigorously examine technology's role on race and race's role in constituting our production of technology. By exploring how emerging technology provides opportunities for users to reconstruct or reproduce race according to their own agendas and on their own terms, I respond to Richardson's caution about "getting what we have always got." Instead, this dissertation explores how new technology provides Asian-American writers the opportunity to construct their racial identities in ways that they cannot offline.

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[1] I take this term from dana boyd, a cybertheorist who define social network sites, "as web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site" (par. 5).

In this chapter, I provide a theoretical framework for my project, contexts for understanding race and new technology from inside and outside of the field, a rationale for non-traditional research sites, and a brief overview of subsequent chapters.

Theoretical Framing and Definitions

In this research, I combine the theoretical frameworks of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and whiteness studies[2] with a participant-observer, ethnographic approach to an online community on the social network site, Xanga,[3] in order to study how Asian Americans use Internet technology to narrate their lives and, consequently, promote and argue for particular identities. I argue that examinations of online contexts are needed because digital modes of writing might lead to new generative acts of identity production. Multimodal practices, such as how alphabetic text can revise the meaning of an image and vice versa, is particularly significant to racial formations, because race, as Michael Omi and Howard Winant argue, tends to be understood as an essential human characteristic signified by one's physical body (54-5). In other words, race stems from a visual logic in which we tend to "see" the signification of color framing an individual or collective. Given both the visual and discursive activities used to create digital texts, I suggest that digital writing can be examined for how users produce racial identities and relationships. Internet technologies allow for the instantaneous and immediate

---

[2] Even though critical race scholars examine whiteness, I call specific attention to this area of study as a separate (but related) framework due to its primary objective in interrogating whiteness as a ubiquitous force in structuring our culture and society.

[3] While I discuss my reasons for focusing on Xanga in detail in chapter two, my primary reason for choosing this site is because Xanga is generally regarded by both users and non-users as being 'Asianified.' I initially set out in my research to see why this image of Xanga seemed so prevalent among online users.

production and circulation of digital writing, and such technologies can be powerful tools in helping users re-conceive race.

Race is a difficult concept to pin down; many scholars have devoted whole books and collections to unpacking race and how it functions in our world (hooks, Lowe, Prendergast). For the purposes of this research, I define race as an unstable social concept and experience shaped by historical forces and representing social and cultural differences between people based on phenotype. Race is a central axis of social organization and a significant "dimension of human representation rather than an illusion" (55). Central to my understanding of racial constructs is how social structures (what Omi and Winant label as macro-level cultural processes) condition the ways that all people understand and experience race on a day-to-day basis, and within the spectrum of these experiences, how individual Asian Americans articulate their own understanding of race as commonplace demonstrations (the micro-level social processes) that can confirm, resist, or transform structural impositions based on racial inequality. In other words, national policy, collective political agitation, economic fluctuations, and other such macro processes shape the power relations and social environment in which individuals (re)produce identities. But, in these moments of (re)production, there is potential for individuals to change their own identities and inform broader social structures. The dynamic between these forces is where I position my work and what I aim to explore.

While race remains a key concept and question for this study, ethnicity plays an equally prominent role. Ethnicity is typically confused with race due to its inextricable relationship with race, but there are crucial differences between these two concepts that

require unraveling. Ethnicity signifies self-conscious, self-forming collectives based on shared culture, descent, history, and/or political aim (Gilyard, *Rhetoric and Ethnicity* v-vi). Yet, this concept comes to stand in place for race as a way to explain collective differences. Because these differences emerge from shared culture and descent, ethnicity and difference have been erroneously understood by many as an uncritical celebration of multiculturalism (Hum). E. San Juan Jr. calls attention to the consequences of "seeing" ethnicity at the cost of race:

> The pseudo-universalism of "We are all immigrants, hyphenated Americans, etc.," simply destroys history. It erases the crucial differences between the incorporation of the colonized minorities by force and violence—not only the intensity of their repression but its systematic nature—and that of the European immigrant groups. (216)

Comparing the immigration patterns of European groups to other ethnic collectives reframes history at best but functions to discipline others by imposing the narrative of similar immigration and assimilation on everyone. Omi and Winant criticize this model, explaining social difference and order because it tends to assume a progressive, assimilationist narrative: because most (European) ethnic groups have "made it," there is something inherently wrong with groups that cannot do the same (14-23). This understanding of ethnicity assumes a level of "relative equality" for all immigrant groups:

> The assumption is made that each minority faces the majority society alone. Successful achievement of mobility—the achievement of high group status—reflects group willingness and ability to accept the norms and values of the majority. (21)

In short, focusing only on ethnicity ignores United States' history and how race, from the onset, functioned to structure and organize society. While an individual can claim to be Russian American, the global contexts placing this person in the United States is, most likely, different than someone who is African American because this groups' history of

slavery continuously informs their collective identities and understanding of themselves and, as San Juan Jr. suggest, this history continues to inform the politics and institutions maintaining inequality based on racial differences.

The problem with ethnicity is not the term itself, but how neoconservative agendas employ a version of it to address racism. Ethnicity, in fact, can be taken up as what Gayatri Spivak describes a "*strategic* use of positive essentialism" (original emphasis, 205). On an individual and group level, ethnicity allows for self-claiming and self-defining against the dominant and the homogenizing effects of racial categorization. As a Vietnamese Chinese American, for instance, I will claim one ethnic identity over others depending on different contexts. The hierarchy placing Chinese superiority above Vietnamese people among my family and ethnic enclave compels me to claim Vietnamese in situations that would challenge such inter-Asian power relations.

The dominant in the context of different Asian ethnicities, though, is different than the homogenizing gaze of the dominant, writ large. As with ethnicity, racism induces "strategic use of positive essentialism." While claiming ethnicity can be helpful in one context, claiming an "Asian-American identity" has and may still provide other inroads into collective political agitation. Lisa Lowe contends "Asian American" and, I would add, ethnic identities, are social "organizing tool[s]" for any given contexts, but "Asian American" "provide[s] a concept of political unity that enables diverse Asian groups to understand unequal circumstances and histories as being related. The building of 'Asian American culture' is crucial to this effort, for it articulates and empowers the diverse Asian-origin community vis-à-vis the institutions and apparatuses that exclude and marginalize it" (70-1).

The multiple configurations of race and ethnicity contribute to the difficulty of teasing these concepts apart and, indeed, I anticipate being challenged with such data in my research due to the pervasive confusion these terms generate in our culture and discipline. One of the main problems with understanding race and ethnicity, then, is its unstable nature (Omi and Winant) and ability to be used for both positive and negative essentialism. In my study, I draw on notions of race, ethnicity, and Asian-American identity as social "organizing tools." In this way, these terms are rhetorical in nature because they are, as Kenneth Burke notes, "use of words by human agents to form attitudes or induce actions in other human agents" (41). They function to structure and distribute symbolic and material resources.

Although CRT and whiteness studies have been typically used in composition studies to interrogate race relations mostly in terms of a black and white binary—as I later go on to argue—this dissertation departs from previous studies because I use CRT and whiteness studies to examine Asian Americans and their digital practices. To establish my research context, I incorporate Omi and Winant's theories of macro and micro formations of race to analyze how race is being constructed on Xanga. In particular, I focus on individuals' construction of race (through textual analysis, surveys, and participant interviews) as a *micro*—the individual and commonplace—level of identity production. This approach of analyzing the micro is consistent with CRT because in doing so, I am also including Asian Americans' everyday narratives of their experiences and "voices" as central aspects of this study. Stories and voices, according to critical race theorists, are essential acts in confronting oppressive representations of raced groups because, as Gloria Ladson-Billings states, "social reality is constructed by the

formulation and exchange of stories about individual situations. These stories serve as interpretive structures by which we impose order on experience and it on us" (24). In short, dominant stories help to maintain "common-sense" racial attitudes and actions (e.g. Asians are good at math; African Americans are good at sports). Furthermore, Ladson-Billings theorizes that telling stories from a minority position is important work in undoing some of the damaging misconceptions about people of color (see also Morris Young, *Re/Visions*). She writes,

> the dominant group justifies its power with stories, stock explanations, that construct reality in ways that maintain their privilege. Thus, oppression is rationalized, causing little self-examination by the oppressor. Stories by people of color can catalyze the necessary cognitive conflict to jar dysconscious racism. (24)

Ladson-Billings conceives of stories from the margin as helping to spark awareness in the very people who may be oblivious or misinformed in their own roles of promulgating racism. Awareness, while not a comprehensive corrective to oppression, is at least a step toward challenging misconceptions one may hold regarding race. CRT, as a theoretical approach, offers me a way to explore how an individual's writing is informed by dominant stories, and conversely, how these stories are working to affirm, resist, transform, and reframe cultural representations and beliefs regarding race. By connecting CRT with scholarship on new media, I hope to theorize *how* and *why* users are reconstructing race with and on these social network sites.

Yet race does not function only on the micro-level but is, instead, always seen in relation to other races within a structural power relation. Even though we may see much fluidity within microstructures of racial identity, those identities are always constructed within a certain power relation in U.S. culture, suggesting a binary relation to whiteness.

Thus, I also take as a fundamental premise to this project that whiteness is a pervasive cultural logic. As many whiteness scholars argue, we are all responding to whiteness as a cultural and social standard; it is a central referent from which other identities are inextricably related. Whiteness constitutes other identities as much as other identities constitute whiteness, but this is often an invisible relationship contributing to the difficulty of anti-racist projects (Chambers, Keating). For example, Catherine Prendergast notes that "Asian-American students don't exist in composition studies—they are either ESL students or unnamed (white)" (*Race* 51). The field's default to whiteness as an (unacknowledged) identity underscores how whiteness typically functions as an invisible logic and standard from which the institution and (some) people operate. While whiteness can be described as a "complex register of identity and a theory of agency defined through a politics of difference that is subject to the shifting currents of history, power, and culture" (Giroux 299), it is important to highlight that whiteness, as with all identities, is not essential to "white" people, but a position of power related to a visual and cultural "white" identity (Barnett, Chambers). Therefore, Asian Americans responding to dominant stories in complicit or challenging ways or Asian Americans who are producing their own stories will always do so in relation to whiteness.

Whiteness is an epistemology and ideology, and not just a position from which one can benefit based on one's body or performance. Timothy Barnett makes this clear in his list of statements he attributes to whiteness: "Whiteness maintains power ultimately by reserving for itself the privilege of recognizing, defining, and denying difference on its own terms and to its own advantage" (10). Barnett connects whiteness with a particular and privileged knowing of the world that constructs its own frame in

seeing the world, but fails to see its own hand in such constructions. Ross Chambers theorizes this even further by arguing that this frame is invisible, so that whiteness is caught up in an epistemology that does not know itself as a point of reference, a frame, or as knowledge. Whiteness, then, promotes ideological constructs distributing "to unmarkedness the privileges of normalcy and unexaminedness and to reserve for markedness the characteristics of derivedness, deviation, secondariness, and examinability, which functions as indices of disempowerment (although, oddly, not always of undesirability)" (189). Narratives from a different position, from a different epistemology, challenge ways of "knowing" oneself and others by subjecting whiteness to interrogation in relation to other identities.

Examining constructions of Asian Americans online is, itself, a project that seeks to highlight the invisibility of whiteness by calling attention to how whiteness so easily erases Asian-American identities in academic sites such as *Computers and Composition*, thus subjecting Asian-American digital writers to the assumption of being white by not being named and/or constructed and examined as Other through dominant discourses of whiteness (Kolko). Specifically, this dissertation takes up LuMing Mao and Morris Young's challenge to our field to produce "work that focuses directly on how Asian Americans use symbolic language in social, cultural, and political arenas to disrupt and transform the dominant European American discourse and its representations of Asians and Asian Americans" (2). In *Representations: Doing Asian American Rhetoric*, Mao and Young concede that the academic world has taken strides in examining the Asian-American experience, but there is still much work to be done in forwarding "systematic studies that focus on how Asian Americans use language to perform discursive acts and

on how they develop persuasive and other rhetorical strategies to create knowledge and to effect social, political, and cultural transformations" (3). Mao and Young's argument supports the view that the Internet, as a developing arena of social, cultural, and political influence, is in need of such interrogation. In short, we may be receiving narratives about Asians and Asian Americans that may or may not reflect their experiences: it follows that looking to where and how these stories are being generated—spaces that include social network sites—can offer the field valuable insights into the relationship between racial constructions and writing practices.

Where Have We Been? Challenging the Black-White Binary

Theorizing issues of inequality, marginality, and difference are not new to the field of composition and rhetoric; in fact, these issues tend to be benchmark topics for our discipline. Therefore, it is no surprise that *Computers and Composition* has also taken up these issues and examines them in relation to emerging technologies. As an established influence within our discipline, *Computers and Composition* can be considered a litmus test for how the general discipline recognizes and theorizes difference as a significant aspect of technology uses and experiences. We can look to the recent topic history of *Computers and Composition* as a way to situate where we are in terms of our understanding and knowledge about race and technology. In my initial stages of researching my dissertation topic, my review of *Computers and Composition* struck me as interesting on two points: 1) articles that address race and technology are mostly focused on African Americans, sometimes Hispanics, and mostly in terms of their lack of access (in its varied meanings) to technology (Bennett and Walsh; Blair; Grabill; Richardson), and 2) there are very few, if any, articles that can directly speak to the

Asian-American student population in my classroom, nor to my own experiences as an Asian-American scholar who is working through what it means to labor, socialize, theorize, and experience a significant amount of my day through digital means. In pointing out these observations, I do not want to infer that scholarly attention to African Americans is in any way a detriment to Asian Americans or vice versa; *I am not promoting a zero-sum game*. Rather, what struck me as important is how the subfield of computers and writing could gain from broader inquiries into different diversity positions. While scholars like Heidi McKee have asked about the intentions behind African-American students' digital postings that can be mistakenly read as aggressive by online readers, we have yet to turn this kind of questioning on Asian Americans as a racial category of analysis. Thanks to scholars such as Teresa Redd and Stephen Knadler, we have better insight into how African-American students experience digital language practices, but what do we know about how Asian Americans compose in digital contexts? What can we say about how Asian Americans access technology that does not depend on race studies based on African Americans or unmarked (white) populations? My point is that as a field we simply do not know enough about Asian Americans to address any of these inquiries.

But, as a field, what we *do* know about online racial identities and formation can be attributed to a body of work mainly based on African Americans, which has certainly broadened our critical awareness of how race and racism operate to maintain social, cultural, and economic differences with new technology (Banks, Richardson; Knadler; Redd; Kynard). In a reflexive analysis, Elaine Richardson considers how she, along with her fellow African-American women colleagues, acquires digital literacies as a way to

remain competitive as employees of higher educational institutions; it is not a career choice. As part of an underrepresented group in the context of higher education and new technology, Richardson also suggests that her African-American colleagues tend to treat digital literacy as a *resource* to be shared with the community. Stephen Knadler shifts his analysis to African-American women students and focuses on the ways that they attempt to appropriate electronic spaces by inserting into it constructions of their bodies, acts that Knadler believes is in contrast to how African-American women behave in workplaces or school settings where they try to "mask" their "Blackness" due to white standards and mores of success. In addition, both Teresa Redd and Carmen Kynard examine their students' relationship with technology, but while Redd describes how her students negotiate the lack of material access, Kynard argues that CMC (computer mediated communication) offers her students a way to imagine and articulate their political identities. Adam Banks complicates our understanding of access from a material approach to multiple modes and levels of access required for digital "success." Technological access, for Banks, has always been and remains an issue of race because such access is just as much about economic and ideological divides as it is a "digital divide." From these studies, we have learned that race, culture, and class greatly matter to how Internet technology is accessed and used by various groups of people, particularly African Americans. Such work has been immensely valuable for helping our field theorize and enact practices fostering more equitable relationships within and beyond our classrooms. These studies demonstrate that the Internet is not the racially equalizing space that earlier technology theorists such as Howard Rheingold may have envisioned. While it can be used in pedagogically successful ways, as Kynard demonstrates, Internet

technology reflects and reproduces the racial complexities that exist in other (every) parts of our lives. This complexity among and with different raced groups has been less attended to in our work.

According to Angelo N. Ancheta, a legal scholar who studies Asian-American issues, focusing on "black experiences" is completely justified: "African Americans have been the largest racial minority group in the United States since the country's birth, and continue to endure the effects of racial subordination. By any social or economic measure, African Americans suffer extensive inequalities because of race" (4). But Ancheta believes that if we do not work beyond the black-white binary to include other races, the focus on African Americans leaves us with an incomplete picture of race in America (4-5). Albeit invaluable, composition's focus on African Americans and technology tends to be taken as a model for all people of color because there is so little of it to begin with and because of the absence of inquiry into the ways other people of color use and understand new technology. To be clear, I am not promoting a view of identity politics in which injury is attributed as an essential characteristic to any socially marked group—racial inequality implicates all people, including unmarked people. In fact, I argue against such simplistic comprehensions about race because of how it reinscribes race as static, naturalized categories of identity.

As Sue Hum states, "[t]he discipline, rhetoric and composition, is inclusive by habit and by historical development" (570). But this does not mean that our field is immune to the entrenched ideologies that have informed our beliefs and practices; inclusiveness can also mean unknowingly accepting ideologies and structures of domination that may appear initially affirmative for writing pedagogy. Hum goes on to

argue that, "[w]hile rhetoric and composition searches for ways to legitimize and value diversity with commendable energy and sincerity, its institutionalization of diversity reinscribes structures that contain diversity within 'the established order of things'" (573). Therefore, I want to underscore the notable lack of Asian-American scholarship within composition studies as an *observation* that can reveal more complicated meanings and knowledge for composition studies, rather than unproductively pointing to the absence as an intentional oversight. That is, when we look to our discipline and the work produced around issues of race, we can ask and examine what it means (ideologically and theoretically) that Asian-American work is missing from the conversation. How do the ways that particular groups are included and excluded serve what Hum calls the "established order of things"?

For Gary Okihiro, such questions expose,

> …"a construct of American society that defines race relations as bipolar—between black and white—and that locates Asians (and American Indians and Latinos) somewhere along the divide between black and whites." This construct is "not merely ideology but is a social practice that assigns to Asian Americans, and indeed to all minorities, places within the social formation" whose "relationships function to institute and perpetuate a repression that begets and maintains privilege." (qtd. by Hattori and Ching, 54)

While Hattori and Ching's essay goes on to challenge the "between-worlds trope" within which Asian Americans are imagined existing, I want to point out *how* the lack of Asian-American scholarship has served to maintain this bipolar construct of race within our own field. I argue that such constructions and perceptions not only absences Asian Americans (and other races and ethnicities) from particular educationally informing discourses and contexts, but they also maintain the belief that *issues,* such as educational access or clashing discourses, are treated as an African-American (and sometimes

Hispanic) issue, that can sometimes implicate/include white people, but rarely does our field bring into relief other races and ethnicities (other than whiteness studies that, again, tends to the visibility of African Americans and the invisibility of whiteness) in order to critique the racial constructs upheld by the simultaneous focus on particular racialized groups while absenting others. This observation echoes part of Steve Lamos' argument in his article, "Basic Writing, CUNY, and 'Mainstreaming': Deracialization Reconsidered." Lamos points out how oppositional voices (from administration and mainstream media) to open admissions at CUNY in the 1970s widely represented the flux of incoming students as "Black and Puerto Rican" and characteristically, as "ignorant and disruptive," instead of including in their discourse the large number of White working class ethnics that made up the majority of incoming students (23-5). The rise of Basic Writing, as a response to the influx of "nontraditional" students, then, became tied to specific students of color due to the racialized discourses that endured in some of our minds as "accurate" history. In addition, current narratives on the civil rights era tend to leave out Asian Americans as student activists demanding full citizenship rights and the recognition of Asian American Studies as a valid disciplinary subject on college campuses across the nation (Sumida). Lamos underscores how discourses based on limiting comprehensions of identity can have lasting repercussions in our social consciousness and within our field, and his research can be taken as a cautionary tale: the selective absence of groups will engender historical and material consequences (see also Royster and Williams on reclaiming history). It follows that the absence of Asian Americans in our consideration of technology and how this absence relates to pedagogy will produce historical and material consequences for the teaching of writing. In

addition, how Asian Americans are represented/represent themselves matters greatly in our purview of race and digital practices/literacies because such representations have far-reaching consequences in influencing emerging beliefs and behaviors on both the individual and institutional levels.

Furthermore, racial constructs supporting a black-white binary can serve a divide-and-conquer strategy in which dominant culture positions minority groups against each other, preventing all racially oppressed groups from uniting against inequity (Lee and Wong xvii). It does a disservice to African Americans who are continuously positioned at the bottom of the social ladder, and fosters a zero-sum, competitive approach for perceived limited positions on the social ladder. In recalling her article, "Wanted: Some Black Long Distance [Writers]," Carmen Kynard speaks to the ways that African American students are disempowered by the very discourse that portends to help them. She quotes Hines et al: "if people of color are seen only as victims, then there is very little reason to entrust them with the tools of the future," to which Kynard adds, "And so, the myth must necessarily reproduce the racist reality. The struggle then is to rigorously engage and critique structural racism as it is reintroduced and reinforced by technologies without reverting to a 'binary logic that insists that race and technology are always at odds with each other'" (333). This passage extends Hum's critique against the discipline's inclusion of diversity in ways that maintain structures of dominant power. To put this another way, scholarship discursively constructing African Americans as a classroom and language "problem," albeit well intentioned, is already complicit in creating a racialized hierarchy, in which discourses focusing on such "problems" can be treated as the common denominator for all students (and teachers) of color. Furthermore,

within this logic of black and white, Asian Americans "often find themselves in a racial limbo, marginalized or unrecognized as full participants" (Ancheta 2); Asian Americans are oscillating somewhere between the disfranchised identity and reality of blackness and the inclusive privileges and "mirage" of whiteness (Frankenberg). This is not to say that we should halt studies that specifically interrogate positions of whiteness or blackness, but it may signal a need for us to rethink how we discursively address race so that it is not limited to a binary logic. My research on Asian Americans, then, does not diminish previous work on race, but contributes to it by dismantling the black-white binary through the inclusion of Asian Americans and by illustrating race as a constellation of power relations.

With CRT and whiteness studies in mind, the Internet is a rich site for considering two related aspects of racial formation: the macro and the micro processes. The rise of technology production and consumption has ushered in new cultural and social relationships where, unlike the one-to-many model of television and radio, the Internet's ability to connect the many-to-many requires a serious look at how emerging technologies are producing new racially-informed identities. Examining how media visually and discursively represent Asian-American stereotypes and how Asian Americans construct themselves through SNSs can help the field work beyond the black-white binary logic dominating most of composition scholarship on race and technology, while bringing to light a more comprehensive understanding of Asian Americans as an underrepresented (and misrepresented) population in America.

The Asian American as Ambivalent Figure

Historically, Asian Americans have been regarded as a contested population in the country's development (Chan; Lowe; Takaki). For example, Asian and Asian Americans are treated as ambivalent figures—are they an unassimilable mass or model workers?—who tend to be rendered visible or invisible in service to dominant narratives and the economy (Carroll; Fong; Hattori and Ching), and they are also treated as foreigners regardless of their citizenship status (Ong; Young). A handful of book-length works generated within composition and rhetoric studies, such as Young's *Minor Re/Visions*, Mao's *Reading Chinese Fortune Cookie*, and now Mao and Young's *Representations*, certainly signals a welcomed growth and interest within our own field. Yet the authors are quick to point out that although Asian-American scholarship is expanding, we still have much work to do in establishing this population as formative to America and within our own scholarship (2). Therefore, given the modest amount of scholarship focused on Asian Americans, it is no surprise that we know very little about the constructions of Asian-American online identities, let alone Asian-American offline identities, in relation to composition and rhetoric studies.[4]

Perhaps it is due to homogenizing and popular perceptions of Asians as economically successful, technologically savvy, and foreign that causes Asian Americans to be overlooked for research; in other words, they may not seem like a population that is in "need" of study. Here, I use "Asians" instead of "Asian Americans" to describe how

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[4] In referring to Asian-American scholarship, I am excluding work on international and ESL students. I am making a clear distinction between such works because, while ESL/Basic Writing scholarship has been invaluable to our discipline, I do not want to conflate it with Asian American uses of English and rhetoric. The theoretical and cultural contexts and goals for these projects may overlap in some areas, but including such work is beyond the scope of my own study.

the majority of the American public perceives people of Asian descent; Asian Americans are more often than not seen as "Asians," and are then problematically treated like foreigners. For Asian Americans, such treatment can be a disfranchising experience. Questions such as, "Where are you from?" while benign, reveal a common belief that Asian Americans are just here on a visit. Morris Young, a scholar of Asian American literacy, considers how the United States has had a long history of positioning and representing Asians and Asian Americans as "less than potential citizens (sojourners who only intend to return to an Asian 'homeland') and as less than full citizens (people unable or unwilling to leave a 'home' culture behind)" (6). In his book, *Minor Re/Visions: Asian American Literacy Narratives as a Rhetoric of Citizenship*, Young revises the minority position into one that is empowered and conscious of its own abilities to deterritorialize language and the power that is invested in dominant language use. He argues that, "African Americans appear more firmly located in American culture as citizens because there is a better awareness of the political and legal history that has argued for full recognition of African Americans as citizens" (57). "Full recognition" remains to be realized for this population. While African Americans are considered American insofar as they are seen *not* as foreigners, popular culture continues to depict Asian Americans as Other, and consequently, their roles as public figures or formative forces in America's history are often unacknowledged by the public (Pham and Ono 183). This absence of historical awareness prevents Asians and Asian Americans from being seen as constituting America's past and current politics, economy, and culture. Given such historical claims, or lack thereof, Asian Americans' material-visual and language markers can signify to others a foreign narrative, even if some Asian Americans can trace their

American roots back to the 1800s (Young 4). But, I would argue that the foreign characteristics attributed to all Asian bodies contribute to ambivalent, stereotypical representations of Asian Americans.

That all Asian ethnics and Asian Americans are homogenized under the label "Asian" highlights how ethnicity and national origin are erased in favor of a racial identity (Ono and Pham). While Young observes this collective experience, he goes on to invert it into an affirmative one: "minority individuals are always treated and forced to experience themselves generically. Coerced into a negative, generic subject-position, the oppressed individual responds by transforming that position into a positive, collective one" (43). Young's work allows me to turn to the digital context and ask exactly what is meant by the "generic" and "stereotypical" for an online community, and how Asian Americans are responding to such "generic subject-positions"—an inquiry that is reflective of Richardson's caution. The reason why this project focuses on racialization and not ethnic distinctions is due to the stereotypes inferred by Young. Stark tragedies such as the racially motivated killing of Vincent Chin, a Chinese American, over competitive tensions between American and Japanese automobile companies in the early 1980s, underscores how the "Asian" body erases ethnic specificity in favor of racialized stereotypes that signaled to Chin's perpetrators, a foreign, successful, and therefore, unwelcomed figure (Ancheta 11). Chin's murderers, frustrated by a slowing economy at home and by a media discourse that portrayed the Japanese as taking over the global market, were heard calling Chin "jap" before they beat him to death with a baseball bat. In effect, the media's representations of Japan's domination over the economy fueled racialized fears that *all* Asians were taking over the country. In this incident, Chin's

ethnicity was conflated into an Asian-as-foreign stereotype that, as Ancheta argues, "puts every Asian American at risk" (11). The "yellow peril" logic combining with the model minority myth, the foreigner stereotype, and issues of technology (the development of an overseas auto industry) was instrumental in Chin's tragedy. Unfortunately, there are surges of similar anxieties over "foreign" competition with the current national and global economic crisis.

From articles covering college applicants who do not check "Asian" for fear of being held to a higher academic standard (Washington) to media's surprised and racist reactions toward Jeremy Lin's athletic prowess in basketball, Asians and Asian Americans remain unrecognized or symbolically rendered exclusive to America: they are seen as American only through their particular, exceptional characteristics. While ethnic differences ought to be acknowledged and valued, this identity category disappears in the face of racial violence, symbolic and physical. That is, while individuals may want to forward their ethnicity as their main identity category, over that of Asian or Asian American, it remains a reality that dominant culture (the macro), when convenient (as in economic downturns), still positions anyone who looks Asian as immediately foreign, thus placing Asian Americans in a "generic subject-position" that disempowers individuals by homogenizing them into one, simplified raced group.

Statistics further underscore the ambivalence and discrepancy in how Asian Americans are represented in culture. The authors of *AsianAmerican.Net* note how demographic data for a government study[5] shows "computer use rates were highest for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (71.2 percent) and Whites (70.0 percent). Among

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[5] "A Nation Online: How Americans are Expanding their use of the Internet," employed by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration, and Economics and Statistics Administration, 2002.

Blacks, 55.7 percent were computer users. Almost half of Hispanics (48.8) were computer users" (xv). With Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders leading in computer use, such data fuels the image of Asians as high tech, what the authors Rachel Lee and Sau-ling Wong posit as the popular image of the "Asiatic geek guys" (xvii). While it may be fair to argue that Asians as a racialized group are economically and culturally privileged in certain contexts in ways that other people of color are not,[6] it is dangerous to assume this out of context and to overlook Asian Americans in scholarly work because of their perceived success as "model minorities." The U.S. Census Bureau's *We the People, Census 2000 Special Reports* offers evidence that consolidating all Asians under a banner of success can be highly misleading. The Census shows that while Asians, as a whole, make above the average U.S. household income (around $9,000 above the $50,000 average), Hmong and Cambodian people, ethnic groups within the Asian racial category, have the highest poverty rates, more than that of any ethnic and racial groups, including Black populations.[7] The same study reports 33.4% of the total Asian population is placed within the language category, "English spoken less than 'very well.'" Such economically marked differences among the Asian population combined with the language insight, if language is any indication of general and digital literacy, presents a contrary narrative to the "model minority" one. Therefore, it is reasonable that Lisa Nakamura and Lee and Wong argue against the census, critiquing it as skewed and inflated because Asians and Asian Americans who do not speak English are not counted in the census (*Digitizing*

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[6] According to the U.S. Census Bureau, *Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2008*, the median income of households is $65,000 for the Asian race group, $55,530 for non-Hispanic whites, and $34,218 for Black people.
[7] The 1999 poverty rate for Cambodian and Hmong people were 29.3% and 37.8%, respectively. The poverty rate for Blacks in the same year is 24.9%. The average rate for the total population is 12.4%.

Race 172). In short, such vexing and contradictory data about Asian Americans ought to be met with further examination, particularly in terms of how Asian Americans are purported to have such high access to computer use, but also have, within its ethnic subset, the poorest populations in America.

How do we begin to account for such challenging data? How do we account for race while recognizing economic privileges and disadvantages? Most theorists would be hard-pressed to offer a confident response because, as Nakamura goes on to suggest, little attention has been paid to Asian Americans and technology because "[S]cholars have strategically ignored Asian Americans as Internet power-users because this characterization separates them from other minority groups and implies that their priorities have more in common with the white majority" (180; see also Lee and Wong ix). Nakamura's point is a good one in that scholars, myself included, do not want to promote any sort of divide-and-conquer strategy among people of color. But disregarding Asian Americans as a population that has a fraught and undertheorized relationship with technology only perpetuates false representations of Asian Americans and ignores how power works to maintain all racial minority populations in unequal cultural and social positions. If scholars are hesitant to theorize Asian Americans' relationship with technology due to fears that this may imply a divided front, I argue that media does a fairly good job at doing this already; we are left with what Richardson implies as the status quo of race and racism (279).

Census data suggest interesting generalizations about Asian Americans: Asians as a racialized group are at the top, or at least perceived as topping the economic and technology category; yet this logic breaks down when we look at individual Asian

ethnicities and experiences. When we consider the Hmong and Cambodian populations that are categorized as having two of the lowest household incomes in America, categorizing all Asians as economically successful would effectively ignore a significant subset of Asian Americans. Such generalities about Asians and Asian Americans are reflected in culture's bipolar representations of Asians as being a homogenous, robotic mass, frequently described as "all looking the same" or being, as Lee and Wong point out, "marked as 'inferior' to whites—and subject to a long history of disfranchisement, military destruction of homelands, and the sex trade of women and children, and the exploitation of their labor and resources" (Lee and Wong xv). The description of Asians and Asian Americans as the population having the most access to technology, in itself, is also highly vexed: while this image lends itself to the tech-savvy Asian stereotype, an image that may appear initially positive, it can produce social anxieties in regards to "the yellow peril" (Lowe 4, 19). Lee and Wong further explains that,

> fears of being taken over by Asiatic geek guys (anxiety over high-tech dominance) may have a relation to the preponderance of Asian female flesh for sale in the formerly low-tech industry of pornography in its recombinant high-tech form: cyberporn. Because Sony is taking over the world, buy American online; better yet, buy Asian women online" (xvi-xvii, my emphasis).

Therefore, one can ask if dominant culture's representations of Asians as simultaneously foreigners and consumable goods help to neutralize any power that can be attributed to the perception that Asians and Asian Americans are economically ahead. Such ambivalent representations also call attention to how economic wealth (real or imagined) does not equate to proportionate cultural representations of power or value, and that representations (through narratives, myths, and stereotypes) may be mechanisms for mediating other arenas of cultural influence.

Furthermore, imagining Asian Americans as model minorities can help to discipline other races —"if they can do it why can't others?"—by attributing poverty and hardships to individual failings while ignoring historical parameters. But positioning Asian Americans as successful and acknowledging data that (problematically) confirms such perceptions can induce social anxieties of the "Other's" economic domination, particularly when Asians in America are not considered as Americans and Asian-American culture is seen as antithetical to American culture. My point is that the multiple representations of Asian Americans as fraught, contradictory, and complex are undertheorized in relation to technology. While we can look to other areas in culture and media to address these representations, inquiry into the intersections of Asian Americans and Internet technology is particularly important due to how Asians are simultaneously constructed as tech-savvy and, as Lee and Wong point out, as highly profitable consumable goods in an increasingly digitally-mediated culture and economy. We, as a field, cannot simply employ access or lack of access as the dominant conversation on race and technology. Although such conversations have been important in considerations of power and the unequal distribution and acquisition of materiality and literacy practices, power also works on levels of representation that are now, more than ever, being used, produced, circulated, contested, negotiated, and transformed by what we experience and conceive of as cyberspace.

While I offer census data as a way to consider the disjuncture between statistics and representations/experiences and to reason through why we ought to examine Asian Americans in relation to emerging technology, this data does not reveal Asian Americans' everyday relationships with language and technology. Thus, examining

specific instances of how Asian Americans are digitally representing themselves and also inquiring into their intentions behind such constructions are crucial contributions to the field because one way to create more awareness of Asians Americans *as Americans* is to include their stories and voices in our work. As a racialized group that faces challenges and inequalities that may be unique to this particular, technologically informed era, it is my hope that this study can offer writing teachers better insights into the ways that online technologies play a significant role in racing (and erasing) Asian Americans online *and* offline in ways that can disempower students by homogenizing and attributing to them, simplistic stereotypes of what it means to be Asian American.

The Disciplined and Disciplining Subject: Bringing a Critical Race Perspective to Digital Scholarship

Drawing from David Palumbo-Liu's work, in "Learning Asian," K. Hyoejin Yoon examines a much criticized stereotype in Asian-American studies, in which Asian Americans are seen as "model minorities," because of their disposition toward hard work, self-sacrifice, self-reliance, and *silent* struggle (read as compliant existence) (298). Thus, Asian Americans are commended for performing an appropriate immigrant narrative because they are not perceived by society as needing or wanting government "handouts." Such perceptions are,

> used to promote and discipline particular subjectivities. […] Their model status functions to keep Asian Americans in line, while pitting them against other, seemingly less compliant, minority groups who do not graciously leave inequality and oppression aside, and whose very grievances are seen as evidence of individual failings in comparison to Asian American 'success.' (298)

Yoon believes that this construct does the double work of disciplining Asian Americans while upholding social, economic, and cultural standards against any perceived

“shortcomings” by other groups. Because Asian Americans embody both disciplined and disciplining positions, I consider Asian-American representations as a technology of racial regulation and, consequently, a technology of racial formation. In short, the positioning of Asian American as “ambivalent” serves an ideological function in maintaining social order. Yet these standards do not take into consideration the historical trajectories unique to each minority group: the enslavement of African Americans is a different history than Asian immigration granted through refugee status. Imposed or “chosen” immigration, as Omi and Winant and Lisa Lowe argue, informs subjectivity and group identity in different ways and with different outcomes. The model minority myth also conceals the large number of Asian Americans who do not follow the appropriate meritocracy narrative. It ignores the more recent Southeast Asian (involuntary) immigrants displaced by the Vietnam War and the mass violence and genocide that followed (Fadiman; Ong) the importation of labor from India for the U.S.’s technology sector (Nakamura, *Cybertypes*), or the visual and physical commodification of Asian bodies benefiting the sex and domestic service industry (Gonzalez and Rodriguez). Such “model” perceptions of Asian Americans paint the population in a reductive manner, evading notions of ethnicity, sexuality, class, gender, and generational differences.

But while representations of Asian Americans can be seen as being generated by dominant agendas, they also emerge from the very people who are implicated by the “Asian American” label and identity. Therefore, it is important to interrogate the relationship between the macro and micro levels of identity formations for understanding the dialectical, contesting relationship between these two levels affording transformative and/or new racial identities to emerge. In Omi and Winant’s words, racial stereotypes

"testify to the way a racialized social structure shapes racial experience and conditions meaning […] Conversely, our ongoing interpretation of our experience in racial terms shapes our relations to the institutions and organizations through which we are embedded in social structure" (59-60). To consider simultaneously both levels of racial signification is to also consider and make sense of the *relationship* between social structures and individuals' experiences of these structural contexts. By conceiving of racial formations as a co-informing process of the macro and micro levels, we can begin to recast the black and white binary as a relationship that is positioned among a constellation of other racial identities, rather than a singular narrative that frames and defines what race means in the United States.

Recasting race within this model will allow me to examine how particular racial categories (like Asian American) are positioned in relation to other racial groups (Native American *and* African American *and* White *and* Hispanic) and also in relation to other ethnicities within a specific racial category (Chinese *and* Filipinas/Filipinos *and* Koreans *and* Cambodians *and* Southeast Asians). Such a model allows me to ask one of my theoretical inquiries: positioned as ambivalent figures (are Asians model minorities or a faceless swarm?), how do we begin to define Asian American within a racial constellation configured by Internet technology and cyberspace? To borrow from Nakamura's work, what ideological, cultural, and social work does the Asian-American "identity" do in cyberspace (*Cybertypes* xiii)? And, how do Asian Americans react to and think about these representations circulating in the sociocultural backdrop? These questions depend on initially comprehending what *is* "Asian American." But rather than theorize for Asian Americans their own identities, something that tends to happen too

often when it comes to scholarship and new media, I am employing this ethnography to reflect on Asian Americans who define their own representations, and thus, identities. I hope my study will be able to answer these questions through the macro, and largely the micro level of exploration and analysis that, at its center, underscores Asian Americans' own reflections on their racial identities.

Furthermore, formations of Asian-American identities entails a look at how Asian Americans are directly implicated by and are racially constructed through Internet technology. For example, the recent technology sector that brought thousands of Asian Indians into the United States through temporary visas (Kumar) or the new ways that Asian women are trafficked as domestic help and mail-order wives through Internet companies (Gonalez and Rodriguiz), calls for scholarly examination into the Internet's role in constructing Asians and Asian Americans as laborers for technology and as commodities. Within this emerging economic, social, and cultural terrain, I posit that dominant constructions of the tech-savvy figure helps to discipline other races on how to be "appropriate" technology users, also read as passive users, but aggressive consumers (Nakamura *Digitizing Race*). Through the discursive re-presenting of Asian Americans as consumers (and therefore good for the country), fears of Asians as an unassailable mass taking over jobs are somewhat diminished and controlled (Lee and Wong xvii).

As visual and physical commodities, "bodies" overshadow/overwrite Asian-American articulations of self and identity; the primacy of the "Asian" as a visual pleasure erases people. In "Good Politics, Great Porn," Thuy Linh Nguyen Tu states that "Asian porn sites are, according to some statistics, pulling in 25 to 30 percent of the revenue" for the multibillion-dollar online pornography industry (267). The synonymous

results for Asian and pornography in search engines and cyberscape in which "Asian has itself become a pornographic category," suggest that not all people are equally represented online nor are they equal users of Internet technology (Lee and Wong xxvi). But rather than halt at theoretical inquiries that posit a subject-object relationship (another problematic binary), in which Asian women are represented as objects of desire for the white, male gaze, I want to shift paradigms to consider how this identity formation works from a different generative position of identity than the model minority or Asian tech-savvy figure, yet serves the same aim of disciplining race relations and maintaining social hierarchies. That is, the construction of Asian and Asian American women (and men) as sexual objects is not (just) about desire or racial preference, but it is also about how these online representations operate as boundaries of and for power relations in which the Asian body accommodates a new logic of orientalism by signifying reference points for Internet users. Drawing from Radhika Gajjala (*Cyber Selves: Feminist Ethnographies of South Asian Women*) and Wendy Chun's works (*Control and Freedom*), I argue that Asian and online Asian representations are constructed as *boundary objects* that accommodate and contain ambivalent images of Asian Americans. According to Gajjala, "the Internet is far from global, but it serves to appropriate the idea of the global for western consumption" (24). Asian and Asian-American identities function as a central figure in this dominant global narrative because it allows for a westernized position to emerge in cyberspace, in which representations of Asians and Asian Americans signify a fundamental identity difference defining what is occidental and normative (Said). That is, constructions of Asian-American identities have been historically defined by difference, and this difference-as-identity (rather than a different identity) is integral in

negotiating constructs of (or orientating) a western, white, (usually male) normative user position. But if this difference-as-identity constitutes Asian Americans, how do they write from and negotiate this part of themselves? Do writers on Xanga even see themselves as different, and if so different from what? Such inquiries, I believe, move us closer to understanding race as a relational concept and experience, even while it structures and signifies material and symbolic resources among different groups of people.

Research Site: Acts of Composing and Identity Formation Beyond the Classroom

In the terrain of composition and rhetoric, the lack of Asian-American scholarship and what Jeffrey Carroll calls, the unperceived "Asian American demonstration—whether of body or voice or both" within public contexts that in itself disallows full participation, may imply that the discipline perceived very little apparent need or exigence that called for the production of scholarship into the ways Asian Americans are racialized and positioned in relation to other races or identities. As I previously mentioned, the lack of such work may be in part due to a well-established assumption in our society and within composition studies of Asian Americans as model minorities and model students (267). This belief ignores how Asian-American identities are used to help structure society, and it leaves in the dark the many Asian Americans who cannot, do not, or will not fit into the model minority myth. But I do not want to assume that only interrogating and theorizing structural components of society and sociocultural hierarchies will offer us a clearer or even complete picture of identity formation. Rather, I want to suggest that including individuals' everyday rhetorical constructions of identity can help the field of composition and rhetoric consider what "Asian American

demonstrations" of voice mean, and it will allow Asian Americans a chance to speak to what has been spoken about/for them. More so, focusing on Asian-American participants in this study will bring into relief identity formation as constructed from a "ground up" model. That is, identity is not just imposed onto people by media and dominant interests, it is also considered, negotiated, and even transformed by individuals in their everyday, literacy practices. The Internet is a rich site for examining racial formations because Internet technology informs new relationships due to its ease and immediacy of producing and circulating online production. Individual production of racial representation and potential for mass circulation changes how representations have worked in previous forms of media, such as print texts and television.

In this way, my study seeks to build on composition's growing body of work on the role of digital technology play in identity formation. Computer and Internet technologies have been relatively new inventions in our history, and their increasing (and rapid) influence on most aspects of our society has spurred on theorists to make sense of these technologies as normative tools and practices in our everyday work and lives. In *Race, Rhetoric, and Online Technology,* Adam Banks theorizes what it means for African Americans to access technology. Specifically, Banks attempts "to make sense of what has happened in the educational system and the nation at large since computers and information technologies came to dominate our understanding of education and the workplace" (xxi). In his study of Black Planet, a SNS that is inhabited mainly by African Americans, Banks is able to show how users textually construct themselves as a preacher figure: "This particular trope is important in a discussion of African American discourse online because that identification with the Black preacher and the adoption of the

sermonic tone amounts to his or her assertively claiming authority, taking permission to speak…" and is also a "[reminder] that both race and culture carry definite meaning online" (79-81). Banks is not suggesting that the preacher figure is an essential identity to African Americans; anyone can attempt to perform this identity, particularly through the use of online technology that "disguises" physical markers. But this identity can be particularly powerful for and among African Americans due to its historical connection with the church, where the preacher has accrued rhetorical and symbolic command as the community leader. Through the preacher figure, Banks demonstrates the specific ways race informs writing and rhetoric. As Banks argues, the Internet can "serve as a cultural underground that counters the surveillance and censorship" experienced by marginal groups, bringing together people who would otherwise be separated by geographic and economic limitations (68-9). The Internet's ability to counter "surveillance and censorship" is particularly important because micro formations of race by the marginalized group need to occur away from the dominants' disciplining gaze and interests.

In addition to Banks, other scholars within the field have also addressed the challenge "to make sense" of these transformative technologies. In particular relevance to my project is how previous scholars underscore the ways identities are constructed through acts of composing. Most work examining the Internet's role in identity formation can be attributed to compositionists adopting feminist, gender, and queer perspectives in order to inquire into how cyberspace operates as a contested social space, reflecting and maintaining cultural beliefs and power dynamics, yet holds resistant and transformative potential because it can and does offer new ways of articulating identity

and subject positions (Alexander; Barrios; Sullivan). For example, in his article, "Of flags: Online queer identities, writing classrooms, and action horizons," Barclay Barrios complicates identity-based pedagogies by exploring online LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) sites and identities. By drawing on Foucault's work, Barrios argues that,

> [identity] emerges from both the stories told about us (the discourses that shape and contain us) and the stories we tell about ourselves (the discourses and reverse discourse we choose to deploy). Ultimately we might see identity as a process of composition in which individuals use the discursive tools available to them to shape a coherent sense of self in relation to the world. (347, my emphasis)

Barrios suggests that discursive acts, informed by the "discursive tools" of Internet technology, are deeply implicated in constructions of identity formation, which then create relational identities and perspectives between the composer and the world. This passage posits a view of narration and composition that directly relates to the work that we do as thinkers and teachers of writing in that *writing is always about identity construction/production, and that writing can therefore work to mediate identity formation and transformation*. Jonathan Alexander takes up this approach to identity when he writes about gay online identity constructions in his article, "Homo-Pages and Queer Sites." Alexander ties web writing (or construction) as an ongoing performance of the self (87). In citing Gail Hawisher and Cynthia Selfe's work, Alexander also underscores the role the Internet has in "the development of new literacies of self" (97); he goes on to quote the authors:

> In this electronic environment of rapid and disturbing social change where conventional social formations and institutions are being deconstructed, personal and group identity—as expressed though language and literacy practices—is, in Manuel Castells' words, "fast becoming the main, and sometimes the only source of meaning… People increasingly organize

> their meaning not around what they do but on the basis of who they are, or believe they are," and they define their primary identities in their everyday literate practices within the networked society. (97)

This passage echoes Jim Porter's argument: the Internet is not merely a tool for writing, but is "increasingly, a writing *environment*" with direct implication for the ways that identities become composed, produced, understood, and used (389). Yet, most online studies tend to examine everyday writing from "the surface" level; researchers rarely go beyond analyzing online writing to interview online writers for their writing motivations and reflections. As Heidi McKee has shown, researchers' (or audience) interpretations of online writing can be vastly different from what the writer intended or how the writer understands her writing operating within its writing environment ("YOUR VIEWS").

Subsequently, scholars interested in inquiries into technology and identity formation are also looking outside of educational institutions, a belief reflected in Kathleen Blake Yancey's 2004 CCCC's "Chair's Address." Yancey asks, "What is writing?" and comments on the learning students do beyond classroom walls. She states, "Never before have the technologies of writing contributed so quickly to the creation of genres. The consequence of these two factors [writing outside of the academy and technology] is the creation of a writing public that, in development and in linkage to technology, parallels the development of a reading public in the 19th century." Yancey's gaze beyond the classroom reflects a well-established practice within the field to study writing not directly circumscribed by the academic institution.[8] In an article for *Computers and Composition*, Jeffrey T. Grabill also notes this phenomenon, but goes on

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[8] Many scholars have made arguments about the value of studies done in nonschool settings, and I don't want to imply that Yancey is touching upon something new. For example, Shirley Brice Heath's *Ways with Word* and Anne Ruggles Gere's "Kitchen Tables and Rented Rooms" are benchmark works in establishing a need to expand our inquiries beyond educational settings.

to justify the field's research outside of the classroom by stating, "[W]hen we move into these alternate contexts [work, civic life, and literacy sites outside of schools], our understanding of how people write with computers will change because work in nonschool settings will alter inquiries and knowledge produced" ("Utopic Visions" 311). According to Alexander, there is "a whole lot of writing going on," and much of that writing is *not* done in classrooms or for writing teachers. And, as Alexander goes on to note, this writing is being mediated by Internet technology (*Digital Youth* 6-9).

In relation to race, research in non-school, sanctioned sites, such as SNSs, have significant meaning for students of color. Work done by Stephen Knadler ("E-racing Difference in E-Space") and L.E. Sujo de Montes, et al. ("Power, Language, and Identity") suggests that within the school context, students of color tend to "default" to a white, normative mode of writing even when online. In referring to his first-year Spelman College students, Knadler writes,

> Although silenced as women, they also feel the pressure of racial masking, or of being careful not to act (as middle-class African-American) as too Black in school, at work, or within other integrated setting. They know that there is no such thing as "free-writing" online because everything that they write has implications for how they are perceived as racial subjects. (237)

If students of color feel "coerced" into a "white" way of writing due to the constraints of a school context, then we can infer that an examination of these writings will always be missing the mark when it comes to inquiries into writing motivations and identity formation in some fundamental way. If students are convinced (and they usually are) that varying dialects or different ways of writing do not belong at school, then to study race in an academic environment entails a recognition that students are always influenced by institutional ideologies causing self-censoring. This view supports Banks argument for

separate cultural spaces that can counter the "surveillance and censorship" of academic institutions. Because race and discourse/language are fundamentally intertwined (Ball and Lardner; Gilyard; Smitherman and Villanueva), students who censor themselves are also mediating (intentionally or not) their own (or teachers and researchers) implications and understandings about race (Redd 366). I am not implying that there is an essential identity to discover and that we can find authenticity outside of school (or anywhere), but the school context may not always be the best, and is surely not the only place to study racial identity constructions through acts of composing. Although there is no way to completely liberate ourselves from dominant ideology, whether we are in or out of the classroom (Hardin), when we look to writing practices done for nonschool purposes perhaps, as Yancey proposes, we can begin to shift our field of inquiry and knowledge when we tend to the writing done through alternative and/or self-motivation. The Internet, then, offers such research sites where users are compelled to engage in socializing technologies, not (usually) because of a teacher's request or grades, but because as dana boyd points out, these are the technologies and sites that today's teenagers are being socialized into as everyday, normative practices ("Social Network Sites"). Finally, the sheer number of users (Xanga has 3.5 million active users and Facebook purports to have 500 Million active users every month) engaging in these social network sites ought to be a strong indication of literacy activity warranting examination (Quantcast.com; Facebook.com; Vie).

Drawing on these scholars, I see the Internet, SNSs specifically, providing marginal groups opportunities to tell stories about themselves, without having to see their identities and experiences *only* mediated through others. SNSs maintain relationships

and groups across time and space but, prompting as well as capturing individual and collective developments. It also allows marginal collectives the tools for re-coopting images (visual, textual, multimodal, etc.) made about them and produced by dominant interests and agendas, using these images for their own purposes. The ease of connection, production, and dissemination afforded by online technologies provide the potential for significant racial formation because these affordances allow for the development of relationships as a consistent, collective engagement. While development of relationships and re-coopting dominant images can and has happened offline, new technologies make these activities much easier and, hence, more possible for groups to maintain cultural and social interactions and for producing and disseminating themselves as culture.

By looking beyond the classroom space to online sites in which Asian-American users are composing their identities, this study contributes to composition and rhetoric a more comprehensive picture of how Asian Americans are engaging in rhetorical acts. Not only will this broaden our understanding on existing Asian-American scholarship on writing and representation, my study also argues for the importance of examining the relationship between Asian Americans and technology; emerging technology as cultural artifact and mediating tool informs scholarly approaches to Asian American as a racial and social category. Therefore, interrogating racialized identity production, as afforded by research on SNSs, allows me to theorize this relationship in rigorous and systematic ways. It is my hope that this study can help writing teachers by providing them with new insights into how race, writing, and technology are inextricably related.

Project Overview and Chapters Outline

This study seeks to uncover the nature of racial formation by examining an online, Asian-American collective. In chapter two, I map out my methodology and research design: beginnings, research questions, site selection, data collection, and data analysis. Chapter three presents a revised theoretical framework developed after unexpected data findings on community and the public as significant imaginaries and orientations for participants. Chapters four, five, and six each analyze data from a few key participants to illustrate a specific moment in how race is formed, given different configurations and tensions between community and the public. These chapters explore participants' specific blogs to show how participants rhetorically construct their identities for belonging to and being "heard" by the community and public, representing the community in opposition to the public, and adopting a "public" position in relation to the community, respectively. Community and the public tend to be treated as separate concepts by scholars, but as participants show in these chapters, they are simultaneously important imaginaries and orientations for their writing and for the formation of an Asian-American identity. In the conclusion, I provide implications this study has for additional work on race and technology and for the teaching of writing.

CHAPTER 2

METHODS AND METHODOLOGY FOR STUDYING ASIAN-AMERICAN ONLINE RACIAL FORMATION

Beginnings

I came to this project hesitantly. In my third year of graduate school taking a course in emerging technologies, a fellow graduate student suggested that I take a look at Xanga because, "you know, it's an online Asian site." I told this colleague "I'll think about it," but the truth was that the more I thought about it, the more agitated I grew at how this person attributed a disciplinary interest to my raced body. By assuming that I would be interested in an "Asian site" because I looked Asian, this person made me feel, for lack of a better word, stereotyped and limited; perhaps I was interested in the Internet's mediation of rational-critical debate (which I was at this point in my career), but this colleague's well-intentioned *and* racist assumption prompted me to step back and think about how racial identities do matter. My body represented a specific scholarly interest to this person and I reacted by moving as far away from issues of identity as possible; initially, I did not want to be seen as someone interested in race because of how I looked. But I soon acknowledged that I was interested in how race informed this person's reading of me. More importantly, I realized that no matter what I decided to do, my body will always be read through the lens of race. While I did not see myself signifying a particular scholarly interest, others' reading of me implicates a broader cultural context at work and I wanted to know how and why this was happening. Why is it that white researchers do not get suggestions to look at FaceBook because, "you know" it was created by a white, Harvard student? Why are people of color made to feel like they represent their collective racial group? This moment, ironically enough, was the

critical beginning of my research because I eventually picked Xanga for this project and with what, admittedly, began as a personal curiosity for knowing how race functions in the world.

Development of Research Questions

I entered this study wanting to know how race formed and functioned online, but I discovered there was very little work exploring the intersection of race and technology. There was even less work examining Asian-American identities. The lack of such scholarship prompted me to ask why this was the case, especially in a field concerned with difference and equity. My initial inquiry looked at what this absence meant in and even beyond the field of composition and rhetoric (see Manalansan IV for an Asian American Studies' perspective). I learned that race is a historically embedded concept signifying a constellation of power relations based on phenotypes and cultural indices (Lowe; Omi and Winant). I also came to understand that race is inextricably bound to representations: how my body signifies particular agendas in the above narrative, how people of color are represented in media, and how we all represent ourselves to others is constituted in and constitutes a matrix of power relations where race is a significant organizing logic. It became clear to me that the absence of work on Asian Americans and technology is due to how this group has been represented. Asian Americans are seen as self-sufficient and successful in relation to other groups and, because of this, only a few researchers have thought to examine this group's relationship to technology (Chun, Kolko, and Nakamura). This led me to refocus my questions:

- How are Asian Americans using new technologies to construct and represent their identities through acts of digital writing?

- How are Asian Americans defining/constructing their identities in the context of circulating Asian American tropes?
- What are the motivations behind such constructions?
- What does this reveal about how users understand acts of writing/composing identities through social networking sites?

These questions were integral in helping me design an ethnographic approach to the study. By considering these questions I realized that I needed to ask Asian-Americans how they come to self-represent because failing to do so would repeat what Larry Gross calls "symbolic violence" against marginal groups: the dominant's power to represent others, create meaning, diminish identities, and effectively maintain the marginal in the margins.

These questions allowed me to focus on participants' understanding and production of race. While I had full intentions of designing a project respecting the ethical imperative between researcher and participants, Iswari Pandey's "Researching (with)the Postnational 'Other,'" Fil Sapienza's "Ethos and Research Positionality of Virtual Communities," and Heidi McKee's "YOUR VIEWS" helped me understand how to enact ethical research in the design of my research. By including participants' stories and voices as integral to the study, I hope to represent participants as informants contributing to this study, rather than studied objects. Asking participants for their opinions—something I will cover in more detail in a later section—also complements my aim to understand race from a micro-level perspective, from participants' own systems of beliefs and stories. In this way, I see my questions dovetailing with CRT goals because representing participants' stories acts to counter and potentially rewrite the "every day,"

dominant logic of race (Ladson-Billings). I also bring in the macro level of race—CRT, Asian-American studies, and whiteness studies— as an interpretive lens for reading data in conjunction with valuing participant voices. Admittedly, writers may not always see the potential effects of their own writing (e.g reproducing gender dynamics); by contextualizing the micro productions of race with macro perspectives and grounding the macro perspective within micro levels, I hope to provide a more comprehensive depiction of race and how it functions within the researched community and Xanga. This chapter maps out my process of chasing emergent research questions and revising my own assumptions regarding research, race, and technology.

Development of Research Site

Initially, I wanted to study an up-and-coming data-mining site called Quantcast. I was interested in how representations of race worked as an online commodity. Quantcast seemed like a good site to explore because it presented itself as an Internet marketing tool. Through a patented algorithm, Quantcast boasted abilities to "analyze" online sites for demographics, lifestyles, geographic information, and other such data. This information can then be employed by interested parties as a marketing tool to understand demographic data on a specific site ("X" site has these kinds of visitors) or as demographic targeting tool (if you want to target 18-23 year-old males, you can go to these sites).

After looking at how Quantcast analyzed popular SNSs, like MySpace and FaceBook, I realized that demographic data and representation provided me very little insight into how Asian-American writers constructed their online identities. In fact, it became obvious to me that examining Quantcast would be a poor and unethical choice if

I really wanted to know how race worked from a ground up model, rather than how race is interpreted by an algorithm and packaged for media conglomerates such as Fox, MTV, and MSNBC. My research question, "How are Asian Americans using new technologies to construct and represent their identities through acts of digital writing?" directed me to Xanga as a potential site.

At the beginning of 2010, I created a profile and became a regular participant on this site, mostly following and commenting on members' writing. In keeping with ethnographic practices, I remained a participant-observer for 18 months. After initial analysis on other SNSs, I decided that Xanga was the clear choice as a research site because of its main focus on blogging. Every SNS differentiates (brands) itself from other sites by emphasizing particular social functions as the site's main socializing feature, and this differentiation is also used to organize the site's networking logic. For example, MySpace highlights forms of entertainment as its main appeal to and for users, particularly music: "MySpace Music is the largest and most popular music platform on the web offering users the most robust song and album catalog available" ("MySpace Factsheet"). In contrast, FaceBook focuses much more on connecting members who are likely to have a relationship prior to and outside of FaceBook. One's homepage is not a personal site, but a digital wall with "What's on your mind?" statements from other users who have been granted access to one's personal page. Thus, a user's social connections are emphasized as the initial login page, instead of a personalized homepage. Facebook will go on to suggest networking with people from organizations with which one has been or one remains affiliated; the site also recommends that users connect to "friends of friends" as a way to literally and figuratively add profiles/friendships to one's network.

While musical interests drives the social engine on MySpace, the notion of one's place seems to ground the logic of how networking occurs on FaceBook.

But rather than focusing on offline relationships or entertainment forms, Xanga emphasizes blogs (digital and public versions of diaries) as its organizing logic. Xanga's motto is, in fact, "The blogging community." Although there is a personal website (weblog) to inhabit and attend to, the homepage organizes around links to "weblog archives" and the option to add blogrings. According to Xanga, a blogring is defined through its function: "[it] connects a circle of Weblogs with a common focus or theme. The theme can be anything you want: a group of friends, a support group, even a shared passion or hobby" ("Xanga Help").[9] The blogring function was initially relevant to my research because it offered a technological means for users to find a community through self-selection into blogrings of interest or shared identities.

This function allowed me to explore blogrings with "Asian American" as the central search term, resulting in over 300 blogrings. The following is a list of criteria I used to pick my online community of bloggers that I focused on as my site of research:

1) Relevance according to the number of members who make up the weblog: some weblogs consist of only one member, and clearly, a sense of community for an ethnographic study would be missing in this case.
2) Relevance according to the degree of activity: although a weblog may have many members, actual writing, commenting, and linking—all signs of activity—may be limited to a few members.

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[9] A weblog is a log or list of blogs, and a user's weblog typically links to other weblogs. Users on Xanga tend to refer to their profile page as their weblog ("Xanga Help"). I use profile page and weblog interchangeably.

3) Relevance according to the start date: this criterion is related to the first because there is less time for members to accrue for more recently created blogrings, and less time for a sense of community to develop.
4) Topic relevance: since I am interested in how Asian Americans construct their own identities, I evaluated blogrings according to its description and how directly the description addresses Asian-American identity/identities.
5) Variation: for my last criterion I looked for a blogring that offered a variety of perspectives around the centralized identity of Asian American. Because I am interested in discovering how Asian Americans are defining their own identities, it would be counterproductive to choose a site that is limited by one ethnicity and/or nationality such as "Vietnamese Christians" or "Taiwanese, not Chinese."

With these criteria, I selected "Asian Diaspora" as my research site and community. Its description reads:

> **Asian** North **American** culture has spanned the continent and become an accepted ethnicity in itself. As young adults growing up under the hyphenated title, whether it be Chinese-Canadian or Korean-**American**, many of us are still struggling to form our own identity between East and West. Come unravel your words, stories, experiences, humour, rantings or random ramblings with fellow yellows! (original emphasis, "Xanga Asian Diaspora")

This description is particularly striking to me because of how self-referential it is in terms of identity formation. In fact, the admission that "many of us are still struggling to form our own identity between East and West" suggests members ascribe to identity as in-process, and perhaps in relation to cultural and/or social differences situated by geographic distinctions. Furthermore, this struggle with a sense of self, and thus, an

Asian-American identity is done through the "unravel[ing] of words," which I see as significantly relating to how the members of this blogring connect acts of writing to acts of reflection and analysis. From this description, I can infer that Asian-American users are attempting to make sense of what it means to be Asian American, and this endeavor is exactly what I wanted to interrogate for questions into identity formations. Although users claim different ethnic identities in their writing, members have chosen to affiliate and identify with this blogring based on a shared sense of racial identity and one that is continuously in process. Geoff, a participant, responds to the survey question #14, asking him why he joined (see Appendix A): "I was looking for a blogring that would allow me to reach out and associate with others, but at that time, I had just come back from a hiatus and didn't understand how everything worked, so reaching out through the Asian Diaspora blogring helped re-initiate me to the whole Xanga experience." That Geoff chose "Asian Diaspora" to reintroduce him to the "Xanga experience" argues for an understanding of Xanga as a raced SNS for him and many members. But Geoff also sees this blogring as a raced technology, allowing him to reach out to others with similar *raced* experience, suggesting that both race and blogring technology can be employed as a significant social "organizing tool" (Lowe 70).

While my intentions were to use this blogring for my research site, I discovered that online engagements were not as neatly bound in pre-structured, macro categories of identities. Many of the members had defunct profiles, and members who were active used the blogring as a subsidiary function to the more communal acts of networking by directly "friending" or subscribing to particular users. That is, users used the blogring as one of the many ways to notify others (or "push" out) their most current activities, but

when it comes to community building, users are more intentional with whom they choose to follow or engage.

I was fortunate enough to have Alex friend me soon after I joined. Alex is considered by many of the users on Xanga as a “Xangalebrity”: a celebrity blogger on the site. To attest to his popularity, it is typical for Alex to have anywhere between 100 to 600 visitors to each of his blogging topics. (I have seen some blogs go into the thousands.) For “Xanga Meets,” in which Xanga members gather in a specific city location to meet other members in person, Alex tends to take the leadership role in organizing and facilitating the meets on the East Coast. In addition, Alex was also voted the “nicest guy on Xanga.” Due to his reputation on Xanga, Alex was able to offer me assistance and advice with how to access what I would consider one of the “insider” communities that exists within Xanga. Through Alex and a few other key members, I was able to establish my presence among a fairly close-knit and solid group of about 50 to 60 Xanga members.

Participant-Observer Role(s)

At the beginning of 2010, I created a profile and became a regular participant on this site, mostly following and commenting on members’ writing. In keeping with ethnographic practices, I remained a participant-observer for 18 months. Even after the data collection, I continued my friendships with many of the participants through Xanga or FaceBook. I have helped some participants with their school assignments by providing advice or editing their writing as a small way to return their invaluable contribution to this study.

I had many moments of hesitation and doubt creating a personal profile for Xanga because I was concerned with coming across as what Geoff calls “an interloper” to the community. I knew I wanted to be completely transparent from the beginning but I also knew that there were risks to being open about my role. Fortunately, most members were very supportive of my work, which was consistent with my findings on the community. Members went out of their way to help me feel welcomed by “dropping by” my site immediately and offering advice and encouragement.

I believed that immediate transparency was also important for maintaining ethical integrity. I wanted to provide all members the option to reject my subscription or friend request even if I was only participating and observing at first. In addition to ethical concerns, being immediately transparent was also an issue of credibility. I did not want members (potential participants or not) to feel blindsided or surprised by my researching intentions after I became a member of the community. Therefore, I divulged my researching intentions from the onset of my participation as part of the introduction to my profile page. When users came across my entry in the blogring or when users visited my profile they came across a short description of me and my work:

> I'm a writing instructor at a MA University, and I'm interested in understanding how identity is constructed, particularly on social networking spaces like Xanga. Currently, I am doing research on how Asian Americans conceive and portray their identity as Asian Americans. What does this racial and ethnic identity mean to you? Have any thoughts? Feel free to respond to my page. (I will not use any information you give in my research without your explicit consent.)

While this ultimately may have influenced who I studied and my participant selection, I believed that being transparent was more important. I was fortunate to receive responses immediately following the creation of my profile, December 2009.

The majority of the responses to my profile were positive and encouraging; users wished me good luck, offered help, and asked me to keep them posted on my progress.

As a participant, I started by subscribing to members from the “Asian Diaspora” blogring. I also had many members subscribe to me from initial exposure to this site, although I moved beyond this blogring to create relationships due to how users were more dependent on who they knew rather than a blogring to create associations. Alex, for example, was the first one to subscribe to me. I was fortunate that I found Alex so soon in my participation. He was integral in both his support and knowledge of Xanga and of our smaller community. He explained to me how some of the technology worked on this site and directed me to users who would be of interest to me. As a “Xangalebrity, Alex had a large following of subscribers and friends; many members respected him as an established voice in the community, so I am sure his support of my presence and work also went a long way in helping me become part of the community and in acquiring participants. In my data collecting phase, I invited participants to provide me advice, feedback, and ideas on my work. Alex took his role of co-researcher seriously and provided me useful suggestions on what and how to ask interview questions after our own interview.

During July, 2010 Alex also invited me to New York City for a “Xanga Meet,” an event that codified my membership into the community and introduced me to future participants. These meets tend to be organized around one or multiple members’ visiting another Xangan’s area. Such news on Xanga motivates other members to plan visits and vacations around these events, resulting in large gatherings spanning days. These sorts of meetings tend to be both online and offline events that can become rather involved in

terms of planning, coordinating, and recounting of experiences from the meets (in blogs, vlogs (video blogs), new friends, and inside information and gossip). From what I could glean from blogs and comments, the New York Meet was a much anticipated event by Xangans who were attending, and even by those who could not—many comments were made expressing members' desires to be there. Part of the excitement was due to the amount of members attending (30) and from different states (New Mexico, California, Ohio) and even different countries (Canada). I, too, was excited to finally meet some of these online friends and community members in person. I wanted to ensure the community that I was not an ill-intentioned researcher.

Being at the meet, primarily as a participant and secondly as a researcher, was extraordinarily odd and complicated. I did not want to make anyone uncomfortable so I did not take any notes during my visit, but I jotted down my observations right after I left the meet. I felt like I was among good friends immediately and this struck me as abnormal. Other members at the meet also voiced this experience and I believe this attests to the online community's strength and closeness although this is a digital community, at least initially. It also struck me that I was among the majority in this group, something that I anticipated, but was surprised by nonetheless. I also attributed my odd comfort to being in a mix of Asians and Asian Americans where the assortment of multiple language use was the norm. I even found myself reverting to mix of Asian-English (Vietnamese, Chinese, and non-standard English) in the midst of this group. That is, I did not realize how significant it was for me to feel *not* different until I was in a group where my own racial and cultural quirks, perspectives, and behaviors were completely ordinary. This sense of feeling abnormal in the comfort and normalness of it

all informs how I write my later chapters in which participants' notions of belonging in Xanga depends on this sort of experience.

As amazing as this experience was for me, it also brought to the fore issues of race and gender. The meet and subsequent activity on Xanga affirmed my suspicions of users fetishizing Asian women and of the gender disparity favoring Asian and Asian-American men in the community. For instance, I observed an older white man at this meet approaching younger Asian women in an inappropriate manner. These stories confirming his fetishizing behavior were shared on Xanga and were widely circulated among members. I examine this in chapter three. But the reactions from some of the men were also disproportionately aggressive against this situation and established clear gender roles in which some women were positioned as victims and the men as defenders.

From the start I was very aware of how my identity as an Asian-American woman would be both beneficial and limiting. In creating my profile I struggled with the decision to post a photo of myself. I knew from casual observation that I may have to deal with unwelcomed subscribers and comments. I noticed that the majority of users who subscribed to me were men (80 percent). I do want to say that most of them turned out to be positive relationships, but there were instances in which I felt as if my visual identity rather than my writing was the sole reason for men to subscribe to me. Although this is an "authentic" participant experience I shared with other women on the site (Angeline, utoppia, and Chris talked about this in our interviews), I was also worried that my data would only involve men. I intentionally did more work to connect to the female/women users on this site. In fact, I disproportionately commented on women's sites than I did men's sites and I also tried to subscribe to women more than men (by a

two to one ratio). Even with additional effort to connect to women members, they were less willing to be in the study. The reason for such gender disparity and gender and sexuality issues are developed in following chapters.

Insider/Outsider Roles:

As a Vietnamese-Chinese, American heterosexual woman, I found my ethnicity, race, and gender informed my participation and research process in both beneficial and limiting ways. I believe it allowed me access to the community that otherwise would be denied ethnographers with different identities. As I mentioned previously, the majority of my subscribers were men and while most of these relationships proved friendly and supportive, I have no doubt that my position as a woman was the initial reason that I was so readily accepted by the men in the community. Yet my acceptance was based on gender difference that also caused me to wonder if I was being left out of the "boy's club"; were the men on this site communicating in ways that I couldn't see or was excluding from seeing? Keen to this gender disparity, I also noticed that topics and responses were gendered. While I did not collect or analyze for this sort of data, I believe that the men were much more "vocal" and opinionated when it came to cultural and political controversies and issues, whereas the younger female users were less likely to write about or comment on controversial issues regarding politics. Although this was typical, it was not always the case. When it came to interracial dating I did observe an uptick on female participation. But the way that women were responded to was a point of frustration for me. In comparing "dd" (a female participant with Level 1 consent: access to online artifacts, only) and Chris' writing on feminization of Asian men, I found many of the comments to dd's blog were oppositional and argumentative, whereas more

of Chris' comments were affirming of his views. In writing about Asian women and fetishes, dd received responses that were hostile, such as, "This is bullshit" and "How is it racist to like someone??" (04/21/2010). In these instances, I contributed by responding with my own knowledge about race. I admit that there were a few weeks where I was overly participatory and emotionally invested with these specific blogs on race and gender, taking away from other various activities on the site. I pulled back from *mainly* engaging on these sites when I realized this and focused more on reading and commenting on other blogging topics. My interest in these topics, I'm sure, influenced what I read and how I go on to analyze the data. I was intentional in seeking out writings about race, but race intersects with such a wide array of identities and perspectives that I knew I needed to cast a wide net beyond issues of fetishizing. While my interest is wrapped up in my research questions, how I respond to potential participants affected how they saw me as a member and a researcher. Their responses could be shaped by what they think they would want me to hear. My understanding of my data, I'm sure, was guided by some of these interests and agendas to read for contested moments regarding race.

I was attempting to be as true to my participant role as possible and my activity consisted of responding to other members and writing about topics interesting to me, such as my scholarship, cooking, and my progress with marathon training. In fact, the majority of my writing revolved around my work and multi-modal blogs about cooking. Even with my effort to subscribe and comment on women's sites, most of my commenters were men (80 percent). Users like utoppia were exceptions. Perhaps I was performing a masculine, academic identity regardless of my topics and did not realize it.

It is possible, also, that my transparency regarding my research immediately turned off many of the women on the site. If this was the case, then their cautiousness is understandable. The female participants have talked to me about their need to be wary of new users due to experiences of being contacted with sexually inappropriate messages. Most of them experienced more visitors and subscribers when they have gone from having a generic image as their profile picture to posting their "real" picture. Some users, like Angeline, have deleted their picture due to harassing responses from strangers.

Being able to experience this myself—the uptick of subscribers when I posted my picture—provided me an "insider" moment in which I was also subject to the gender dynamics on this site and provided me opportunities to understand much more clearly why someone like Angeline employs particular rhetorical strategies in order to both meet and subvert community and public expectations of being marked as an Asian woman.

I found my ethnic and racial identities a less contentious experience, but they were just as important in informing my research process. At times I felt so comfortable with the community that I failed to see patterns. These were the moments when sharing my research memos with my dissertation director, Donna LeCourt, proved invaluable. She was able to point out that ethnic difference was a possible topic to explore. Data showing inter-ethnic conflict due to ethnic difference among users was something that I did not "see" because I took this as a given. For example, one of Coolmonkey's blogs includes a picture of Nicholas Cage, the actor, and his wife, an Asian woman. Under the picture, Coolmonkey writes, "You guys thought I was kidding when I said you needed money to date an Asian chick? Hell, even Nick Cage isn't rich enough!" The responses to this blog pointed to the woman as Korean and played her ethnicity against economic

desires: “oh god she’s Korean” and “lol [emoticon for laughing out loud] she was made in korea my friend” (03/25/2010). These ethnic stereotypes intersected with racial constructions on this site and complicated notions of identity construction because it indicates a constant challenge against “Asian American” as a unified, homogenous group.

Data demarcating the ethnic hierarchy within the Asian race was something else that I did not consider important at first glance because it was something that I grew up knowing. For instance, I remember one blog about interracial dating and a commenter responding that her mother would want her to date an Asian man, starting with her mother’s top preference for Chinese, Vietnamese, and then Japanese men. Her mother placed Japanese men at the bottom of this dating preference list because of the contentious history between Japan and China, a context that outsiders may not know. I admit that my “insider” position blinded me to ethnic difference that may be obvious to outsiders, but as Sullivan and Porter posit,

> The first step, then, in achieving political or ethical research through research practice is the process of acknowledging difference, including exposing hidden or obscured difference that often ends up dominating. […] What if we can’t see difference? Aha! That is where the critical research orientation provides us with some assistance. Respecting difference requires first of all an openness on the part of the researcher(s) to the possibility of difference, a willingness to concede to reciprocity as a critical principle in research relations, and ultimately a willingness to see who the participants are. (112)

Although I continuously strive to “acknowledge” difference in every step of this project, acknowledging, also, the impossibility of recognizing all difference allowed me to maintain a critical stance by seeking other interpretations of my data.

Sometimes such critical and ethical approaches means participating with the knowledge that such participation will not manifest in data. For example, being a

member of this community exacted an unexpected emotional toll that I was not prepared to address at times. One stark example happened early in my participation when an underage user friended me. While I had no intention of using him in my study, his writings about his hostile home life and his suicidal musing due to his rejected homosexual identity consumed much of my time and energies. Due to his underage status and his mental state, I did not contact him for this study but I did extend my friendship. Yet, this relationship colored how I read intersections of race and sexuality because I realized how important it was for Asian and Asian Americans to have a space to talk about their sexual identities. This helped me consider how the home and ethnic enclave played a significant role in participants' desire to seek community elsewhere, especially when alternative sexual identities are grounds for being disowned by many Asian families. For example, this endeared me to Chris, a focal participant in chapter four, and informed our developing relationship because he writes about the antagonistic relationship between his "gay" brother and his mother who threatens to disown his brother if he doesn't "straighten out."

As a participant, the biggest obstacle for me was to share myself on this site. I admit that my initial hesitation with this study included the fear of "putting myself out there." Blogging about my life was very difficult especially because of the semi-public nature of the site and because I saw myself as someone who is fiercely private. In fact, directly referring to my own experiences and insider knowledge in this study remains highly uncomfortable for me due to how this implicates my own identities. My decision to blog about scholarship was easy, but writing about my cooking and my training for running a half-marathon felt forced. Beyond this, I couldn't bring myself to write about

anything more personal, such as my own childhood and offline relationships, as many of the participants have done. Participants' willingness to share their lives on this site encouraged me to share to the extent that I did, but I admit that I was much less open about my life relative to community members.

In hindsight, I believe that I, too, was engaging with what Nazli Kibria observes her participants doing in "compartmentalizing" personal life and school life (33). My academic, scholarly arena is where I performed professional and "American," in contrast to my home life where my ethnic and cultural selves are more prominent. In entering this study, I did not realize that I would have to deal with combining these two modes of being in participating (as an member) and researching (as an academic) Xanga. My hesitation to share my life on Xanga and even in this study speaks to my resistance against collapsing what I have worked most of my life to neatly separate. In fact, managing an insider/outsider position that collapsed my own distinct realities proved so difficult at times that I suffered from anxiety attacks and paralysis with the task of blogging about myself. I eventually got (somewhat) beyond these moments, but this position (that I ironically go on to examine with participants in later chapters) does affect how I fashion my research. For example, I am sure there are moments that I could have included more personal stories to share with participants and more personal insights for supporting my findings, but a lifetime of compartmentalizing my identities is not something I can erase from my ethnographic lens and my research. Instead, I admit that this continues to be a position with which I struggle.

<u>Mapping the Culture</u>

In my early participation phases (pre-IRB and data collection), I attempted to keep track of my development of my own membership in the community as well as how the community developed for me. My participation as a blogger and commenter is archived, but there were initial patterns, topics, and experiences I wanted to capture as it was happening in situ. In order to describe this culture and accomplish the "thick description" Clifford Gertz promotes for ethnographic work, I employed various models of capturing the culture. As Sullivan and Porter argue "All forms of data collection are static snapshots of what is fundamentally a fluid set of events" (5). Although the authors are speaking about data collection, I found their approach helpful in understanding the contours of the community prior to data collection. That is, I wanted to use various methods of recording and reflecting as a participant-observer in order to construct a sense of the community through multiple angles. In this way, I hoped to prevent myself from homogenizing the community. Instead, I aimed to depict the complexity of this culture by mapping the culture with field notes, research memos, aggregate data (quantitative and qualitative data sans subject information), and initial patterns. This preliminary mapping of the community provided me a richer sense of the contexts in which individual participants inhabit. It eventually informed the themes critical to conceptualizing the rest of my project.

Field Notes and Research Memos

I took field notes starting December of 2009 until the end of my data collection phase at the end of 2011. In my field notes, I mostly reflected on my daily activities of Xanga. I either emailed these notes to myself or posted some of these reflections on my

page, allowing members to comment and contribute to my reflections and inviting members to help me create meaning from the very onset of the study. I never addressed specific members or blogs in these postings. If I felt that the notes were more personal or sensitive, I would email these as reflections to myself. Field notes included reflections on emerging patterns (intergenerational tensions), significant relationships or events (Xanga Meets), my reactions to specific writing ("This is so frustrating to read!"), or lengthy descriptions of an event:

> Finally got on to Xanga Zombie, which Alex told me that a few Xangans put together so they can have a real-time chat component to Xanga's other features. It's interesting that users went ahead and added this to Xanga, because they felt that a chat function was missing from SNS. Well, since I've been on Xanga (1/2) hour, I had a back and forth with Alex […] He pulsed [pulses are word-limited notices on Xanga] for some advice on clothing, and it was fun to give him my take on the jacket/sweater that he was thinking of buying. (04/15/2010)

While this sort of reflection did not impact my data collection directly, it did capture the everyday activities indicative of this community. In this field note, I wanted to record Alex introducing me to Xanga Zombies because I thought this would add another layer of interaction in my participation as well as contribute to a more comprehensive sense of what users on this site were doing. My participation through this other Xanga technology helped to codify my membership in the community and introduced me to potential participants in a "face-to-face" way that I believe shaped my ethos as a "real" person rather than a distant researcher, a potential limitation of online research (Sapienza).

I tried to remain consistent with creating field notes and research memos. Knowing that writing activities tend to happen throughout the week, particularly at the end of the work week, I would do most of my reflection on weekends when postings and comments slowed down, and there was more of a "natural" end to the commenting

activities. In practice, I was not always consistent with this schedule when I had work obligations.

Every few weeks I collected these field notes and wrote up more formal "research memos" to see if I could articulate a condensed version of my experiences on Xanga. Research memos proved to be invaluable in this study because this is what I would share with my dissertation director. In these memos I usually explained my process in addition to my reflections on initial patterns:

Some of the tropes that are being constructed and affirmed online are both negative and positive in nature. But, I have found that users' act of affirming Asian and Asian American tropes have tended to be negative tropes, although this is my interpretation of the rhetorical construction. I am curious as to how users will respond to my interpretation of their constructions when and if I can interview them. The negative tropes that have been most prevalent and interesting to me are the "FOB" and the "Asian girlfriend" trope. FOB is an acronym for "Fresh off the Boat," and has been used in derogatory ways against new Asian immigrants. (04/25/2010)

As a triangulating method, sharing these memos provided me opportunities for a different set of eyes to interpret and make meaning from my experiences and ideas (Bishop 48), and for checking my "blind spots" to emerging data (Sullivan and Porter 99). These memos reflect my initial, inductive awareness of what were important issues to explore, like the interaction between visual (static and non-static) and textual constructions of Asian-American identities. While I started out with simplistic observations in these memos ("Videos play an interesting role on Xanga, whether they are embedded videos from other sites, like YouTube, or produced and published by the

users themselves" (06/27/2010)), this reflection in particular led me to understand how Angeline uses visual rhetoric to help her parse the community from the public, a key insight into the ways Asian Americans use images for online writing practices (chapter three).

Aggregate Data and Initial Patterns

Before and during my data collection phase, I collected aggregate data starting with blogs dated between August 2009 and 2010. Aggregate data does not require IRB approval since it is generalized data unattached to individual identity in this study. The users I examined for aggregate data could become potential participants I contacted once I received IRB (and some did), but my rationale for collecting this data was to provide me a broader sense of the community by accounting for the emergent patterns and to understand inquiries such as what can be considered a high frequency of writings about race relative to the community. The timeframe for collecting aggregate data is arbitrarily set so as to prevent me from looking at too much data.

In one aggregate data set, I looked at 40 members and picked out some of the most salient themes emerging from this community. The number following the themes correlate to how many times the topic was addressed by participants in their blogs:

- Tech-savvy; gamers; topics connecting technology to identity (19)
- Media; pop culture; "Hollywood's" representations of Asians and (more rarely) Asian-Americans (50)
- Feminization of Asian men; Asian fetishes; gender/sexuality issues related to race (37)
- Intergenerational conflict or tension; (23)

- Ethnic signification through differences of conflation (25)
- Defining race and ethnicity through particularities, e.g. food, movie references, and insider discourse (35)
- Mixed-race; hyphenated spaces or identities; multiplicity (47)
- Interplay between visual (static pictures) and texts (35)
- Whiteness (28)

A different set of aggregate data attempted to map out participants different levels in addressing race. I took a sample of 36 members:

Table 2.1: Frequency of Blogs Addressing Race

	#:
High (9+ blogs)	15
Middle (5 to 8 blogs)	6
Low (1 to 4 blogs)	12
None	3

What I perceived as high or low frequency is relative to the community's activity in writing about race. This data set confirmed my observations that the majority of users do address race in their blog writing.

Yet another set looked at specific blogs addressing race and recorded the activity levels from readers. For this set, I looked at the number of views and the number of comments a blog received. In looking at 51 blogs addressing race from a spectrum of varying users (typical, atypical), the average visitor view is 340 and the average comment is 31. The ratio of views, 10 views to 1 comment, reflects my observations of commenting activity, but the average amount of views and comments seem to be inflated in comparison to my observations. That is, 340 is a very high number for most of the blogs I have looked at, and I attributed this to atypical users like Alex, a "Xangalebrity" who can acquire thousands of views and hundreds of comments for many of his blogs. By

taking out three users from both extremes (most viewed and least viewed; six users total), the average views went down to 85 and the average comments decrease to 11, reflecting more closely my observations of blogs.

Toward the end of the summer, 2010, after I created the aggregate data sets above, I generated a list of categories. These categories speak to my observations, but they were also informed by the previous sets of aggregate data:

- Intergenerational tensions/conflicts:
    - users who discuss their parents' cultural expectations of them in terms of career and gender roles, e.g parents disapproval of users' life choices;
    - parents are invoked around issues of dating.
- Gender issues, as related to race:
    - feminization of Asian/ Asian American men;
    - fetishizing Asian girls (e.g. "mixed babies are cuter" myth and Asian fetishes);
    - pictures of Asian girls as a rhetorical device for gaining readership;
    - Asian girls and the stereotype that they are expensive to date.
- Hollywood's representations of Asians and Asian Americans:
    - the industry conflates different Asian cultures;
    - white males are cast in leading roles (the absence of Asian-American males and the substitution of what should be leading Asian males with white males in movies: *Dragonball: Evolution, Airbender, Prince of Persia*);

    - Images of feminized Asian-American men can fall into this category as well;
    - Asians and Asian Americans portrayed as comic relief, sidekicks, or secondary characters.
- Ethnic signification:
    - critiques against Koreans as being nationalists;
    - critiques against Korean women as "gold diggers."
- Defining Asian American through interesting (other) means:
    - food seems to be a way and a context in which users invoke their culture and heritage;
    - how marital arts movies tends to spark some dialogue or comments about Asian cultural values. Users seem to be able to gather around these topics to affirm their interest regarding martial arts movies, but in ways that are not just about the action.

These preliminary data sets helped me map the community while providing me deeper understandings of the context from which individual participants wrote. This approach mirrors Christine Hine's form of online ethnography, consisting "of a researcher spending an extended period of time immersed in a field setting, taking account of the relationships, activities and understandings of those in the setting and participating in those processes. The aim is to make explicit the taken-for-granted and often tacit ways in which people make sense of their lives" (4). By triangulating my methods, I believe that I am able to better represent participants and "account for the relationships, activities and understandings of those" in this study.

Although invaluable for helping me think through Xanga as a writing environment, this list eventually caused me some conceptual issues with how to organize the arc of my dissertation. My initial approach caused me to depend too much on a topic-based approach for thinking about racial formations; I realized that these categories often overlapped when I tried to examine a category or a participant; the categories provided me a false sense of separation in understanding race. For instance, Chris' writing combines intergenerational conflicts, feminization of men, and issues of whiteness. This overlap and messiness was indicative of all participants, and I had trouble knowing how to make sense of such data. I continue to address my research "messiness" in the section on data analysis.

Evolving Community Contours

My initial plan was to examine "Asian Diaspora" as the "community" for this project because of its description involving Asian-American identities as in-process. I believed that this blogring would expose me to a rich research site due to members who possess some inclination to racially identify with Asian American. But as I became a more established participant I realized that limiting my interactions only to members of this blogring would also prevent me from experiencing a more realistic engagement with the community on this site. Therefore, I saw my researched community as broader than the core members of "Asian Diaspora." The community initially evolved through interactions with the most active members of "Asian Diaspora" who took initiative to extend their welcome to me by "friending" me or subscribing to my profile.[10] Likewise, I

[10] Friending is a function on Xanga that allows "friended" people access to private posts. Subscribing is different than friending in that users are notified when subscribed writers post something, but subscriptions do not provide access to posts placed on a private setting.

also friended and subscribed to the most active members defined as users who posted blogs on a frequent and consistent level. This was easy for me to ascertain because I was able to go on "Asian Diaspora" and see the most recent posts from members. Also, I developed a sense of the community by observing commenting activity as a mark of community engagement. When members like Alex consistently respond to comments on his blogs or on other users' blogs, I found this a clear cue that users were part of the community because they are active in building and maintaining relationships between members.

Community boundaries eventually broadened from the core members on "Asian Diaspora" (about 30) to include members who do not subscribe to this blogring. This was determined when my own activities were noted by "friends-of friends" to members of "Asian Diaspora," showing me that members create affiliations through multiple means. I also had some members refer me to particular users who would eventually make good participants for my study, although this only resulted in a handful of members. While my community broadened beyond "Asian Diaspora," it is a small unit within Xanga's social networking world, which consists of over one million users. Eventually, this core of about 30 members turned into the 60 to 70 members I consider the community for the research. I determined membership beyond the core I initially found on "Asian Diaspora" by considering the "relationship" a member had to the community in their blogging consistency, and/or commenting consistency, and by topics they addressed (as listed in preliminary observations). I assessed these components by following the interactions between particular users and others, including myself. That is, users outside of "Asian Diaspora" responded to members inside of this blogring and vice

versa, and so much so that I considered them part of the community; their interactivity pointed to connections independent of “Asian Diaspora.”

From observations (and affirmed by surveys), demographic information mainly consisted of students between the ages of 18 and upper 20s. While most of the community are on the younger end, the most active and popular of them (e.g. Alex, Alexander, Sonlay) are in their mid to late 20s. In hindsight, this demographic data makes sense due to the need for users to establish their role in the community over years of interaction. Most of the users affiliate with an Asian-American identity due to their “Asian Diaspora” membership or verified in interviews. (I did not think to include a question regarding this in the survey given my initial beginnings with “Asian Diaspora.”) The community includes diverse ethnic backgrounds: South Asian, Southeast Asian, Filipino/Filipina, Chinese, Japanese, Laotian, Cambodian, Vietnamese, Pacific Islander, Hmong, Korean, Thai, and Taiwanese, to name the ethnicities I have come across. While I examined members mostly of Asian descent, there were members, albeit in fewer numbers, who were white and African American. Although I and many users consider the community as Asian-American, I attempted to reflect the spectrum of racial difference I encountered on this site by including races different from Asian-American. One “white” member and one mixed-race (“African American” and “Filipina”) are part of my interview data set. While my participants ended up including more men than women, the community members were slightly more gender balanced: 60-65% men and 35-40% women.

As I participated beyond these early observations of the studied community, I found that participants’ values and behaviors affirmed my initial assessments. Using

Nancy K. Baym's approach for defining her online community, I also looked at users' content and activity (what Baym calls performance) to help me gauge my sense of the community because what members repeatedly write about is what matters to them as a community. Content includes the kind of topics members write about, and I drew from my list of tropes in considering this: intergenerational differences, gender issues, ethnic signification, etc. Topics that I did not list include blogs about food and cooking, relationship stories or issues with significant others, and travel accounts, especially when a Xangan makes a trip to see another fellow-Xangan or when a Xangan hosts. One of the more unique aspects of this community is their offline relationships. While most of the members created friendships on Xanga, they also extend these relationships to offline contexts. Alex, Alexander, and Sonlay became very good friends in this way and would usually make plans to fly across the country to visit each other. Participants' willingness to engage offline attested to their felt relationships online and, in fact, writing about their visits on Xanga helped to strengthen the online community while confirming the tradition to visit each other and write about it. I borrow from participants interviewed and surveyed when I describe this community as a "close-knit" and "supportive" collective.

I found one of the most compelling ways to understand the community is to consider members' belief that they belong to something unique and welcoming. This sense of the community emerged when I repeatedly came across blogs reflective about this very topic. It seemed like every few months Alex would blog about his own relationship with Xanga and the community's "closeness." In one blog titled "Eight Years Later, I'm Still Here," Alex writes,

> Today marks the eighth year I've been a member on this site. How many more years will I be on here? I have no idea. I do know this; Xanga has

> been wonderful to me. It has allowed me to express myself in ways I can't often do otherwise. It has allowed me to stay connected with friends, following their ups and downs as they do the same back to me. It has led me to discover new friends, many of which I have met in person and are now some of my closest confidants. It truly has given me a lot of memorable experiences that may very well define my twenties. For all of that, Xanga has my full support and loyalty. I hope to stay an active member as long as I can. (05/05/2011)

This blog received almost five-thousand views and over two-hundred comments affirming this perspective.[11] Not only is the community unique for being so supportive and close-knit, it is also distinctive in how it is self-reflexive of itself as a community. In this way, I saw community as a value that defined this community as a studied site/relationship and, in fact, the community-as-value emerged as the most salient data in my formal data collection and analysis.

Data Collection

As with the preliminary triangulating methods for mapping the culture, I also relied on multiple approaches for collecting data. I draw from Asian-American voices for informing my understanding of racial formation, but I did not want to represent "Asian American" as a homogenous collective (Kibria; Manalanasn IV). In order to capture the complexity of this culture and maintain ethical integrity to the participants and community, I designed the study in ways that highlighted participants' own narratives, perspectives, and voices, providing them opportunities to reflect on their own writing and give input into my study. By gathering data from online artifacts (blogs and comments), surveys, and interviews, I accomplish what Kevin Eric De Pew calls "method

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[11] Alex has a large following that does not reflect the community I came to know. In fact, the community we both share included members more consistent in their responses to Alex, underscoring the reciprocity required in maintaining and defining community. Alex is also an aberrant; his following and perhaps his own sense of community is not typical of other members. However, his passage reflecting the community is representative of how members in the studied community would see themselves.

triangulation," an approach "which helps the researcher examine multiple aspects of the rhetorical situation" and where one method's weakness can be compensated by another method's strength (53). De Pew goes on to argue, "By examining the textual artifact, researchers potentially leave aspects of the text unaddressed, such as the outcome the rhetor intended the document to create—such as a change in the audience's actions or beliefs or a good grade" (54 "Through the Eyes"; see also McKee "YOUR VIEWS"). Although my methods do not ensure complete ethical soundness, it was my hope that my series of data collection will help me avoid speaking for the participants as the only position of "objectivity," what De Pew refers to as the "god-trick" (53-6).

Participant Selection

Once I received IRB approval (July 2010), I used the preliminary data sets to help me create a guide for selecting participants. For example, I wanted to collect data representing a more comprehensive picture of the community in keeping with my aim to not homogenize this collective, while depicting its complexity and production of race. Hence, the "frequency of writings addressing race" data set provided me a sense of potential participants who would provide me potentially useful data on race. The average amount of visits and comments writers received also gave me a sense of who was a typical or atypical member on this site; this particular data also provided me insight into participants' status within the community: how often blogs are visited and commented on signals the user's connectivity to their community. Connectivity, as Hine contends, is a significant part of online ethnographic research: "An ethnography of, in and through the Internet can be conceived of as an adaptive and whole heartedly partial approach

which draws on connection rather than location in defining its object" (10). The following chart guided me in participant selection:

Table 2.2: Participant Selection Guide

Participant selection based on access and activity:	Interested users: users who are willing to give me consent Active users: users who contribute on a fairly regular basis (about once or more per week), by posting their own blogs to the "Asian Diaspora" blogring. users who interact with other users on Asian Diaspora by leaving comments on their blogs or in response to others who leave comments. Users located within the United States. Although this is not a stringent criterion, I argue that users who follow my postings and respond to my blogs have/will display some interests in being participants.
Participant selection based on cultural/rhetorical content:	Typical Users: I see these users as having some consistency (they write on the site about once per week) in their participation, but these users may also tend to blog about a wide variety of topics. They also respond to other blogs, and receive responses from other members in the community. Atypical Users: can be characterized by their content that is narrow in scope, e.g. everything on their site is devoted to a hobby or selling homemade products online. They may be characterized as being nonresponsive to other bloggers' comments or do not leave comments on other weblogs, and therefore may not have a communal relationship. Conversely, these users may be seen as "Xanga celebrities" and have their writing highlighted on the "Featured" section of Xanga's homepage. The "Featured" section is like a recommendation page from Xanga, rather than an individual user. Themes: users who address Asian American as an identity in a notable way: Users who are directly addressing race. Users who indirectly addressing race through other means. Users who complicate race. Users who do not address Asian American as an identity in a significant way. For example, these users may subscribe to the "Asian Diaspora" blogring, but do not (visually or textually) address Asian American as an identity or as their own identity.

Some of my participant criteria clearly overlapped. For example, the criterion based on activity in the "access" category may also characterize typical users in the "content" category. Instead of making delineations between the two, I believe that part of ethnographic work requires the embrace and struggle with the "messiness" that is part of

experiencing and interpreting any culture (Bishop). I continuously referred to this guide during participant selection so as to create a representative sampling of the community. While I strive to be as consistent as possible with my participant selection, I am sure that my own biases informed my choices. Also, there are some initial decisions made that influence the resulting participant selection. By starting with "Asian Diaspora" as my initial access to the community, I admit that this affected my exposure to particular community members.

Once I generated a list of 60 potential participants, I contacted individuals through Xanga's messaging function. These 60 members constitute the community; this amount would have been slightly higher by a few, but I decided not to (or could not) select users who stopped blogging or deleted their accounts in the process of my participation and data collection. I have included a copy of the message as Appendix B. I asked any interested members to email me if they were interested in being part of the study (Xanga's messaging function does not have the ability to attach forms). When members emailed me stating their interest, I sent them three forms: the IRB approval letter, the consent form, and the survey (Appendix A). Twenty-four members consented to the study (15 men and 9 women); 19 participants completed surveys (15 men and 4 women); and 11 participants went on to the interview phase (8 men and 3 women).[12]

In the consent form I included multiple options for participation in the study. Participants had the choice of using a pseudonym of their choice, to use their username, and/or to use their real name in the study. I offered this because some participants were excited to have their username noted in the study for more recognition on Xanga (what

[12] I describe why this study resulted in more men than women in the section on "Researcher's Role(s)."

they referred to as “e-fame”). Only two participants opted for a pseudonym. Most of the participants allowed me to use both their real name and username.

I divided participant consent into two different levels based on how much they may want to be involved in the study:

> Level 1: Participant consented to the use and interpretation of their online composition only. While most of the profiles and writing done on Xanga are public, for ethical reasons I wanted to make sure that users were aware of and consent to my use of their work. I believe that users ought to have knowledge of how their writing will be used for a different context, beyond their original writing intentions.
>
> Level 2: (includes level 1) Participant consented to the use of and interpretation of their online composition, and would also consent to a survey and a follow-up interview based on both online texts and their surveys. Participants can opt for their preferred form of interviewing (email or Instant Messaging), by phone, or face-to-face, if possible on my end.

Since I am working with an online context, face-to-face interviews were not always feasible due to geographical limitations. Users can hail from any part of the world, although I specifically limited my selection of users to the United States. As such, it was not possible to meet with all participants for interviews, although I tried to do this when possible. Also, I wanted to offer participants as much convenience and comfort with engaging in this study as possible, and this required acknowledging some users may be

more willing to participate if given the option and convenience of communicating through the use of online technology or through phone interviews.

One of the difficulties of online research is making a decision regarding how far along the chain of writers and responders to ask for consent and how to deal with participants' representations of others. In the article, "Multimedia Research," Janice McIntire-Strasburg brings up the issues of consent when it comes to markers of identity different from alphabetic texts. The author notes that traditional consent may work well when researchers need to black out names or use pseudonyms to protect subjects, but this becomes challenging when visual and audio data are required for the study. For example, do researchers acquire consent from the person in a picture but posted by a relative? At the heart of this concern are issues of representation: who gets to represent whom? Throughout this study, I remained vigilant with this question because this study is as much about issues of representation as it is about racial formation; these are not exclusive. While participants allowed me access and use to anything posted on their blogs, in addition to consent forms I emailed participants to ask them (again) for permission when using any personal images.

This decision was also informed by a negative experience when a new subscriber to my site, a young white man, copied and pasted one of my photos on to his blog. This was done without my consent. It was a picture of me and a few friends posing after a 5K run for a local charity. On the blog, he drew a red line pointing to a friend, another woman of color, and asking, "Is that you?" I have had a profile picture posted for quite some time, so this member's question suggested that he couldn't distinguish between women of color (we do not look similar; she is not Asian nor appears like she is of Asian

descent) or that he did not bother to look at my profile page going through my archives. This experience highlighted for me the importance of ethically considering visual data as much as textual markers of participants' identity.

However, I made the decision not to acquire consent from commenters posting responses to original blogs. Given that some of these blogs have hundreds of comments, it was impossible to get consent from all commenters. I also thought about how commenters are aware that their responses are being read by users they may not know, by a potential public. Commenters do not have control over how their comments will be made private or public; this is dependent on the original blogger's account setting. Both the original blogger and commenters can take down the commenter's response, and this brings up the question of who has control over such responses. On one hand, commenters wrote these responses, but on the other hand, these responses "live" on a blogger's site. In returning to my representation question, I decided against asking for consent from commenters because I was interested in analyzing and representing participants' blogs and how they reacted to comments—the emphasis on examining original bloggers informed my choice.

Because this community is "close-knit" (Geoff) many of the participants respond to each other. In such cases, I was able to use not only the participant's name but I asked participants about their roles as commenters and specific comments they made in the interviewing phase, thus providing my study a more comprehensive picture of writers and their writing activity in this community.

To conceal commenters' identities I refer to commenters by a generic numbering system connected to each blog: Commenter One, Commenter Two, etc. This numbering system starts over with each blog analysis included in the following chapters.

Online Artifacts

Once participants gave consent to the study, I started to collect digital artifacts in the form of blogs and corresponding comments. I use the term "artifact" from Christine Hines' work theorizing digital production as "cultural artifacts" in order to suggest that digital activity is a cultural production embedded with contexts and ideologies (9). Since artifacts can include anything produced by a specific culture, I also see it as a more appropriate term to describe alphabetic texts, visuals (static and non-static), audio, and any combination of these multimodal components. My collection was not limited to participant activity, but also included general data such as screenshots of Xanga's homepage, descriptions of particular technologies, and the overall reflections of the site. These artifacts included descriptions of the "Featured" page, the purpose of blogrings, and the make-up of the profile page. These general online artifacts were collected throughout my research.

While various online artifacts provided a different way to establish the study and participants' context, participants' blogs dominated this data set. Consenting participants (24) limited what blogs I was able to collect. I examined all participants' profiles and went through their archives, selecting between three to five representative blogs for each participant. Given the large amount of potential data, I limited my blog selection by returning to my main research question, "How are Asian Americans using new technologies to construct and represent their identities through acts of digital writing?"

This focused my selection to blogs directly addressing race. By directly, I mean writing that highlighted race as a main or one of the main topics in the blog. In a trial run sampling a few participants, I still found "blogs addressing race" too broad of a term to help me choose representative blogs—most consenting participants fall into the category of high frequency of writing about race. Therefore, I turned to my initial "List of Categories" to help me narrow the selection of blogs. With an average of three blogs per participant, this provided me over 70 blogs.

Employing both my research question and my list of categories can be described as a recursive method for collecting data. Narrowing blogs by research question and then once again through my initial categories resulted in a more manageable data set, but also this approach also ensured that I was addressing my research question.

Surveys

Most participants consenting to interviews completed a survey divided into four different sections: questions regarding demographic data and identities, general questions regarding participant's history with Xanga, questions regarding "Asian Diaspora,"[13] and general questions about race (Appendix A). Some of these invited participants to reflect on their history with Xanga, their motivation to remain on Xanga, and how they defined "Asian American." I included the survey because I was influenced by Hine's argument that offline and online contexts are porous: "Observing online phenomena in isolation discounts social processes offline which contribute to an understanding of use of the Internet as a meaningful thing to do" (27). Hine, then,

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[13] This section was included before I realized that I needed to consider members beyond Asian Diaspora as part of the community.

understands that offline contexts influences if and how one uses the Internet and this suggests that offline contexts are just as important to the production of race online.

For a study concerned with race and identity formation it is important that participants' individual and collective history informs the analysis of data. Race itself emerges from historical contexts and affects how participants understand and produce race both off- and online. Hence, this survey addresses both a theoretical and methodological need for participants to self-represent their identities contingent on history (Lowe). In addition to history, I believe that participants' self-representations, such as racial and ethnic identities, and perspectives on race complemented the other data sets by affording a different layer of meaning. Surveys, then, generated more and essential data allowing me to understand the multiple contexts from which participants constructed Asian-American identities. In more specific terms, the purpose of the survey was to provide:

1) comparable data among participants;
2) more insight into participants' views on race, given some of the questions I included;
3) a different set of data to cull for emerging patterns;
4) demographic and background data critical for understanding informing contexts beyond online artifacts; and
5) participants' *own* description of their identities and their Xanga activities.

Interviews

Including participants' perspectives seemed like an obvious research choice and alignment with my theoretical framework for examining micro levels of racial

formations. But I also wanted to see how such micro formations of race intersected with the macro levels of race: would data show that users reproduce the same Asian-American images circulating in the broader culture or would I find participants producing different and new Asian-American identities? Because I was interested in examining racial formations from participants' perspectives, interviews greatly contributed to this study because it placed a spotlight on participants' own process of making meaning about race. Valuing everyday narratives about race, as critical race theorists advocate, is important not only for understanding race, but voices from these margins can challenge and even change every day, "common sense" logic regarding race (Delgado; Ladson-Billings). Following this, I argue that the absence of marginal voices and stories compound systemic oppression and myths regarding race. The implication of including or excluding participants' voices, then, is an issue of representation; who gets to represent whom is political work (Mao and Young; De Pew). Ultimately, as the researcher and writer, I am representing participants in this study. And while I cannot guarantee that I have represented all my participants ethically, interviews have been one method for ensuring that participants have input into how I read their blogs and surveys. Therefore, I agree with McKee's argument that online researchers typically depend too much on text-based analysis without interviewing participants for their perspectives on their own digital production (McKee "Deliberative Dialogue" 4). Participants' perspectives capture a more comprehensive picture of the community and their writing, but they also help prevent mis-readings or misrepresentations of participants and their writing intentions.

While my intentions were to interview all participants consenting to interviews and who took the survey, some of the participants decided not to interview after

completing surveys. This was mostly due to the timing of my interviews. I interviewed participants between September 2010 and March 2011, and because most of my participants are students, their busy schedules prevented them from proceeding with interviews. I attempted to interview all 15 willing participants but ended up with 11 interviews due to either my own and/or participants scheduling conflicts.

By entering interviews with pre-generated questions, I provided some focus to my data collection with my initial research questions in mind (Bishop 99). In addition, I wanted to allow for meaning-making "from the point of view of the members" of the community, particularly if my goal was to understand race and racial formations from participants' perspectives (Moss 13-5). I approached interviews in a semi-structured manner, providing me both the direction and the flexibility to be open to participants input and the possibility of pursuing other leads.

I created a general list of questions to act as a guideline during interviews:

"Interview Questions"

General Questions:

- Do you see your "writing" on Xanga different than the writing you do elsewhere in your life? Why or why not?
- Do you see Xanga's technology influencing how you write on this site? If so, how?
- How do you see different writing components (such as images, videos, and audio) interacting with each other in your blogs?

Questions specific to Asian-American rhetoric:

- In what ways do you see your racial or ethnic identity influencing your writing? (Again, I will be selecting texts to show participants.)
- In reading other user's writing that addresses issues of race and ethnicity, can you explain your own posted commentaries more fully?

Questions specific to participants' texts:

- What meanings do you read from this blog?
- What were your intentions behind writing about "X"? Or, what do you hope this "text" will do for Xanga's community/your audience?
- Given this blog product, do you see the inclusion of images/video/audio/etc. an essential part of presenting your writing intentions? What if you didn't have these other components as options for your writing product?
- In what ways do you think your (specific) blogs informs or influences your online community? Do you see this being accomplished? Why or why not?
- In what ways do you see other users' responses (to specific texts) influencing you?
- In reading other user's writing that addresses issues of race and ethnicity, can you explain your own posted commentaries more fully? What are you intending/meaning? Or, can you tell me how you are impacted by this writing as a member of this site?

These questions were meant to tease out various aspects of participants' relationship to and reflections on Xanga and their community, their own writing, and

their racial and ethnic identities. Participants' responses, I hoped, would provide me more comprehensive insight into their contexts from which they produce racial identities (or not), and ultimately, I generated these questions to "get at" participants' perspectives on engaging with online technology and digital writing to construct their racial selves. Because I was interested in how participants respond to their own blogs, I applied the questions from the last section, "Questions specific to participant's texts" to the three blogs I had selected prior to the interviews.

The sequence of examining blogs and surveys before interviews allowed me to enter interviews prepared to ask participants about their own online productions and survey responses. I gathered all data related to each participant a day before a scheduled interview to ensure that the material was "fresh" for interviewing. In addition to the pre-generated list of questions above, I printed out blogs and surveys so I could refer to them during interviews. I also made notes and questions specific to each participant's blogs and survey. For example, Alexander wrote "Human" under the survey inquiry for "Race" (question #4). I thought that this response warranted more explanation on his views regarding race and I noted this response for further inquiry. I pointed out to Alex, (different from Alexander), his response to a question regarding "Asian Diaspora": "I think I would relate to it." I asked him to explain what he meant by this and he said,

> Coz I'm from, like being Asian-American you, you identify yourself with American culture, Asian culture and sometimes it sucks to like know where you actually stand, I guess, or something. Ummm… so I guess through Xanga, for example, like since there are a lot of Asian American writers on there, ummm… it's, it's very nice to see the issues that I'm dealing with or experience is very common with them as well.

Given this response, I asked Alex to describe examples of blogs he found relatable. Through this open-ended inquiry, I built on Alex's knowledge and experience of his

community and writing. This method of inquiry helped me mitigate questions that may have been too directive of participants' responses, thus confirming my own preconceived beliefs.

By asking participants to reflect on other members' writing, participants described their own understandings that proved important for how I eventually analyzed data. Participants painted a more interconnected community that I would have missed without interviews. For example, Angeline's reflection of Coolmonkey's blog allowed me to see how humor functioned on this site to affirm community relationships and caution strangers (chapter three). In my interview with Chris, I discovered that Chris and Angeline knew each other when they were younger but Angeline moved away and they lost contact. Their "accidental" meeting on Xanga years later underscored Xanga's role for connecting Asian Americans (chapter four).

In most of my interviews, participants were very involved in guiding the direction of the interviews. I found that a simple question, such as "what do you mean by 'feminized' in this blog?" was enough to spur involved reflections from participants (Chris). Typically, these questions would raise other questions, resulting in a much more organic, open-ended form of interviewing. I discovered that I rarely referenced my pre-generated list of questions; rather, I depended more on the blogs and the questions emerging from these conversations.

I provided participants options for interviewing: in person (if it was possible on my end), by phone call, through a Skype session,[14] or with the use of an Instant Messaging program. I met with two participants in person, I Skyped with four people,

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[14] Skype is an online software affording video and voice calls.

and interviewed five with the use of an Instant Messaging program. No one wanted to interview by phone. Skype interviews were recorded as audio files on the computer and on a separate digital recorder in case one technology failed. Unexpected research insights emerged from providing participants choices in how they wanted to be interviewed. Participants' reasons for choosing Instant Messaging technology were due to convenience or to the preference of the textual component over face-to-face interaction. In hindsight, it made sense that participants who were used to interacting through blogs would be more comfortable with writing their responses in interviews. While the clear benefit of this method is an immediate transcript, I was surprised by how much better my questions were in comparison to the other forms of interviewing. By taking the time to write my questions and see them on a screen, I was able to revise questions that may have been too directive or less relevant. When there were pauses in communication, I was able to reread previous text and assess for more thoughtful questions stemming from participant's own responses.

Most of the interviews lasted for about an hour. Some interviews went on longer if I felt that participants were engaged and wanted to continue the exchange. For instance, my interview with Chris lasted for three hours. My interview with Alex lasted almost two hours.

Data Analysis: Seeing the Forest Through the Trees and the Trees in the Forest

I did qualitative analysis of blogs, surveys, and interviews, noting any emergent patterns on race-related references, topics, rhetorical strategies, and activities. Race itself is such a complex and relational concept. Race cannot be isolated from its contexts and other identities; it is a concept and experience constituted with and among other markers

(visible and invisible) of identity. Coding for race, then, was the most challenging part of this study because I did not think that coding for just themes or just specific words would be sufficient enough to capture the complexity of racial constructions. Therefore, I casted a wide net in culling for as many patterns as I could find, knowing that I would be working with a few categories from this list.

The series of preliminary and formal data collection shaped my overall sense of the community and participants' experiences, helping me conceptualize the rest of my project. While I made decisions to narrow my collection by using preliminary categories to pick blogs for participant interviews, I attempted to remain open to the different data I gathered throughout my research process. By moving between my own observations, participants' digital productions, surveys, and their interview narratives, I approached data in an inductive and recursive manner. That is, I employed an inductive approach as described by George Kamberelis and Greg Dimitriadis:

> [Inductive analysis] involves analyzing multiple forms of data (e.g. texts, observations, interviews) to discover recurrent themes and thematic relations. Most forms of inductive analysis involve multiple and interrelated phases of coding or categorizing, along with various forms of preliminary analysis and cross-checking. Coding and analyzing data begin almost as soon as data collection begins, and the process continues throughout the final write-up. (19)

My analysis, as Kamberelis and Dimitriadis depict, did start "as soon as data collection" began. Collecting online artifacts ended up being a much more complex back-and-forth process than selecting blogs, as indicative of qualitative research. I looked for emergent patterns such as repeated topics, issues, and identity constructions in hopes that such patterns would point me to potential inquiries and answers. Also, my aim in analysis included what Wendy Bishop illustrates as a process of "data reduction, data display, and

conclusion drawing/verification," in order to "learn what we know before we show what we know" (113). I attempted to be as open to these patterns as possible but I concede that my research questions remained an informative force in my collection and analysis.

I proceeded with data analysis through four main phases at the onset of data collection (July 2010) until the end of my writing; each phase was typically marked by significant data analysis and, consequently, by the shift in my thinking and understanding of the data. In practice, some of these phases occurred simultaneously; the overlapping nature of data collection and analysis contributed to the messiness of qualitative research; I coded data while I was interviewing the last of my participants. Just like Bishop, I "amassed more data than I can use, and I have constructed drawings and charts and literally littered the house with books, papers, photocopies, and reminder notes to myself as I draft[ed]" (113). The table below is an attempt to make sense of my inductive approach and what seemed like a constant cycle of disorder and "Aha!" moments:

Table 2.3: Phases of Inductive Analysis

Phases:	Time Frame:	Activities/Analysis/Approach:
One	December 2009-July 2011	Observations; Field Notes; and Research Memos; and Preliminary List of Categories
Two	July 2010-July 2011	Data collection (Online Artifacts, Surveys, Interviews); transcribed six interviews (other interviews were immediately "scripted" with Instant Messaging technology); coded data; entered data into NVivo[15].
Three	February 2011-July 2011	Started drafting chapter three; examined new and salient patterns; and presented on Community and Public data at the "Computers and Writing" conference that influenced future analysis.
Four	May 2011-June 2012	Recursive approaches in drafting chapters: returning to data, reading for relationships between data; and framing and reframing chapters' logic.

[15] I explain NVivo in a following section.

While I covered Phase One in the section, "Mapping the Culture," I want to emphasize the importance of this phase for the rest of my project. My field-notes and research memos were critical in helping me make sense of "the community" and subsequent data collection. This phase captured much of the context which I returned to for understanding participants' relationship to their writing environment.

Transcribing and Coding: Difficulties and Discoveries

Throughout Phase Two and Three, I transcribed interviews as I was collecting them. I started interviewing September of 2010 and my last interview happened in March, 2011. I transcribed all six of the in-person and Skype interviews because I wanted to be close to my data. Transcribing allowed me to perceive emerging patterns from the start. As I transcribed I tried to recall the contexts that could be informing of the data. For example, Nick was visiting his parents when we were interviewing and the context of his parents' home and presence seemed to influence his discussion about them. His home life factored into much of how I understood him as a participant in this study. I also attempted to capture my own feelings and thoughts so that I could reflect on how my own position and biases were informing the interview and how I read the data. This was less possible to do with Instant Messaging transcripts. While Instant Messaging allowed me to be more reflective about my interview questions, I did not have similar visual cues (what Hine calls a "reduced social cues model") from which to draw as informing context (15, 38).

Coding proved to be a much messier and more recursive process than I initially expected. In fact, it was one of the most difficult researching processes to work through due to the sheer amount of data I collected: 19 surveys and 11 interview transcripts, with

a page count of almost 300. Given this amount of data, I decided to not code the correlating blogs used for interviewing. Transcribing was helpful in this case because I had some grasp of patterns; I became more confident in my sense of patterns as I progressed with transcribing. In being open to emerging patterns I decided to go through and do an initial coding of *all* surveys and interviews as I received them, noting in the margins of printouts when I came across repetitions of words, themes, attitudes, and identity constructions. Once I created a coding scheme from this initial coding, I placed this aside for a few weeks. During this period I completed more research memos and reflections and shared this with my advisor in order to "get at" the data in a different way. These reflections were initial attempts to make sense of my data in situ:

> I was just thinking how important it is for Asian Americans, who have been rendered invisible in culturally and political ways, to have something like Xanga and other SNSes to assert their presence as visible, as belonging, and as agents. I keep going back to what utoppia said: "We just want to be heard" (03/25/2011).

I placed this aside to return to coding data, but this insight became invaluable for writing chapter three.

After some distance from the initial set of coded materials, I decided to code a "fresh" printout of the data. Along with sharing some of the data with my advisor, it was my hope that some distance from the data would allow me to see patterns I may have missed the first time around. I compared these two sets as I entered a third set into NVivo, a software program for organizing data. NVivo helps researchers organize coded data, but it does not generate code; the researcher enters this manually. By using two sets of coded data, I strove to engage with the data in a way that would reduce biased readings, while being open to other patterns that may not have occurred to me during the

first reading. In the table below, I picked a sample from Bryan’s transcript because it includes complex patterns that I was unsure of in my initial coding:

Table 2.4: Coding Sample

Sample Data: (The highlighted sections are what I focused on coding)	Code Set #1	Code Set #2	Code for Set #3 (NVivo):
Bryan: this video has been around for many years, since youtube was very young. **Bryan:** it is a satiric excerpt from a longer homemade movie.		multimodal production	multimodal productions
Bryan: it portrays the asian mother stereotype and is relatively accurate **Bryan:** allowing a large group of young asian americans to relate		reference to other online sites.	reference to other online sites.
Bryan: and poke fun at their own experiences. **me:** So you are saying that you think Asian moms are like this? me**:** Oh, okay.	affirming stereotypes	affirming stereotypes	affirming stereotypes
Bryan: i am saying that it was represetative [sic] enough to gain somewhat of a cult following **Bryan:** something like what wong fu productions has.	humor	humor	humor; support
me: How important (or not) do you think it is for young Asian Americans to be able to create these works? **Bryan:** i feel like it is extremely important. if you take a look at the allusion i made to the esmie tseng story and dig deep	relating to others		
Bryan: you will see that esmie seemed to lack a network of similarly pressured asian peers who could satirize and **support** her. **Bryan:** but then, we must keep in mind that esmie was facing some ridiculous extremes **Bryan:** even on an asian parenting scale **me:** Do you think that Xanga or other online sites offer this sort of support? **Bryan:** i feel like xanga has a good percentage of **supporters**. **Bryan:** facebook as well	support (lack of) references to inside knowledge? pop culture?	Trope: intergen-erational tensions	Support; Trope: intergen-erational tensions
Bryan: especially since it consists of peers **Bryan:** and for most young asian americans living close to other asian americans, facebook is invaluable for networking.	support; technology: networking ref: Facebook	support; technology; networking; ref: to other online sites	support; technology; networking ref: to other online sites

This coding scheme shows how I saw similar themes ("affirming stereotypes" and "technology: networking") in the first two sets, which ultimately appeared in the final coding set I entered into NVivo. But there were inconsistencies between the first two sets as well, and such inconsistencies gave me pause for re-examining my coding scheme and how I could best represent participants' words. For example, Bryan's passage referring to Esmie Tseng was a difficult section to code because it seemed to me a very complex reflection referencing multiple patterns and issues. Bryan refers to Tseng because he includes her as an example in his blog critiquing Amy Chua and her article, "Why Chinese Mothers are Superior," which seemingly extols the advantage of "Chinese" upbringings. But is this a "reference to pop culture" due to how Tseng's story has been made relatively famous due to media? In 2005, Tseng was charged with brutally stabbing her mother to death, but most of the controversy focused on Tseng's childhood and parents' expectation of "perfection" in her academic performance and musical abilities; she was punished for anything less and sometimes made to stand on street corners naked (BBC News). Or, should this section be coded as inside knowledge since Bryan did not explain this story in his blog but referenced it in a way that suggests his readers know about Tseng? As the first coding shows, I also considered if this should be read as a "lack of support" ("you will see that esmie seemed to lack a network of similarly pressured asian peers who could satirize and support her.")? I decide to exclude "inside knowledge" and "pop culture" because these seemed to be conflicting codes. In considering his blog in this reading, I also knew that Bryan was using Tseng to challenge Chua and experiences with "Chinese" upbringing. This challenge against the older generation is something I observed repeatedly in my participation and in collected data,

and its primacy influenced how I coded the last set. For these reasons, I decided to code this section as “Trope: intergenerational tensions.” I also included “support” in this selection because it comes up twice within this passage and, again, as a pattern in other data.

In hindsight, I believed that I could have been more efficient with time if I had taken a smaller sample of the data and created an initial coding scheme. But given the larger samples of coded data, I was confident that the patterns were, indeed, patterns and not imposed biases. Due to the recursive nature of using preliminary categories to narrow my selection of online artifacts, it was no surprise that some of the patterns were the same as the preliminary list. But, there were patterns that I did not expect. For instance, community and public appeared many times in initial coding, but while this was interesting to me I did not think about it until I entered this data into NVivo and saw that quantitatively, community was coded 70 times, the most salient category in my set. Initially, I thought that I would find the most influential data in the blogs, but the simple survey questions asking participants to describe Xanga to a friend or to explain what motivates them to write on Xanga provided me some of the key data regarding community-public framework I develop in chapter three. Almost all surveys included a nod to community as the main descriptor or motivation for continuing engagement on Xanga. But it was not until I examined together all the parts of the data collection—online artifacts, surveys, and interviews—that I realized how important constructions of community and the public (which came out in interviews) were for writers and how they developed their identity.

Seeing the Forest through the Trees: Making Sense of Data

My coding process provided me a large range of categories to draw from resulting in 63 categories. I include a partial list (please see Appendix C for full list):

- Asian and Asian American Fetishes and Yellow Fever
- Being Heard or Accepted, Voice/Voicing
- Community
- Public
- Empowering or Empowerment
- Direct Address of Language, Language Issues
- Race and Class
- Race and Sexuality and/or Gender
- Representations between texts and images (static and nonstatic)
- Representations of Asians and Asian Americans in Popular Media
- Lack of Representations of Asians and Asian Americans
- Affirming Stereotypes
- Complicating Stereotypes
- Rejecting Stereotypes
- Use or Reading of Humor or Sarcasm
- Whiteness
- Writing Intentions
- Participants' Perspective on Xanga's Demographics

Ultimately, I did not use all the categories on this list, but I found it invaluable in utilizing NVivo as a tool for cross-referencing these categories and providing me insight into

relationships that may have otherwise gone unnoticed. Therefore, I made the decision to keep the list as large as it is because I did not know what would be relevant when categories were placed in relation to each other. Because the data was organized and readily accessible through NVivo, I did not see it as a hindrance to deal with such a large list of categories, but, rather, I believed the list would allow me to understand the relationship between various categories that would have been difficult to "see" if I remained with printouts. As a case in point, by cross referencing "Community" and "Use of Humor or Sarcasm," I was able to see how important the use of sarcasm was as a rhetorical strategy for creating community. I was able to bring up data coded for both of these categories, which allowed me to see if there was a relationship between these two categories. I did see that humor worked to create community, and I used this data to address community in chapter three.

By cross-referencing "Community" with "Being heard or Accepted," (36 references) I realized that many of the participants felt estranged in their offline contexts—they did not feel like they belonged at home or in more public arenas like school—explaining why the community on Xanga is so strong. With this method I re-read participants' responses with new significance. Chris, for instance, wrote "Xanga was and is my sanctuary. It's a community where what I say and think has some meaning" (survey). Yet I did not see that it was Chris' home life that compelled him to find "sanctuary" with Xanga. When I initially came across similar responses in data, I was struck by how important community is for participants, yet it did not occur to me to look at reasons for this significance. In fact, I coded for community thinking that it would be helpful for my understanding of the participants and culture, not knowing that

community would become an essential part of this project and how I go on to think about my data.

While I started my study with this broader aim of learning how Asian Americans construct their online identities, the process of collecting data pointed me to other questions. Throughout Phase Two and Three, data indicated a need for more focused questions: Why is community the most salient datum? How is community constructed on Xanga? These unexpected data challenged my research process and I realized that I would have to grapple with this data. I attempted to answer this question in Phase Three of my process through a recursive process of examining data, drafting research memos, and sharing these memos with my advisor. These memos allowed me to articulate other discoveries:

> utoppia's opinion that users are engaging on Xanga because they want to be heard" resonates with her latter comment about Asian Americans ("without [Xanga], I think they might not have a way to express themselves"]. If, as utoppia suggests, Asian Americans are using Xanga to be heard and to express themselves because they are not able to do so in other area of their lives, then it would make sense that some Asian Americans are able to find a community on this site, in which "being heard" partly defines their sense of belonging to this community. (03/30/2011)

From this reflection, I began articulating how important it was for participants to "be heard" and to feel supported in this community. By looking back at data on "intercultural tensions," I realized that participants were referencing alienating and problematic experiences in their home environments in their blogs and interviews. For instance, in his interview Aaron recounted how his parents used to be very "hard" on him and he remembers being stripped naked and locked outside his house as punishment, similar to

Esmie Tseng. Feeling like they belong on Xanga, then, was very important for many, not all, participants, given their experiences growing up.

Although I felt as if I was gaining clarity in this process, these moments of clarity were short-lived due to other patterns challenging me to reread and understand my data against assumptions. Data on "the public" came up almost as much as community. I found this perplexing because it seemed to me that community and public were opposing concepts. My assumption that participants perceived these concepts the same way I did prevented me from understanding that they, in fact, did not have a problem with engaging with these imaginaries simultaneously and in tension in their writing and in their interview descriptions. This insight was the most important turning point in my research because it contradicted everything that I assumed about community and public, but it also allowed me to reread data with a more focused aim of attempting to understand how community and public imaginaries were functioning for participants on this site, and ultimately for their racial constructions.

Once concepts of community and the public refocused my work, I set out to understand how Xanga afforded these spaces for participants. Approaching community and the public in this way—a focus on technology's affordances—proved an unviable direction. During the summer of 2011, my objective to explain how Xanga's technology afforded community and public spaces was a frustrating endeavor because something always felt "off" or missing in my attempts to draft. In working through drafts, redraft, and revisions, I realized I was asking the wrong question. Instead of asking how technologies were affording these spaces, I should have been asking why community and the public are such important "spaces" for participants and what it allows them to do on

Xanga. That is, participants seemed to be valuing community and public spaces and even audiences on Xanga, but it wasn't until I attempted to understand this importance that I started to see community affording writers the ability to create a stable identity and that the public afforded them the ability to experiment and change their identities. Understanding that technology affords community and public imaginaries did not answer the "so what?" question. Rather, comprehending *how* community and the public imaginaries allowed writers the opportunities to construct their racial identities in the simultaneous imagining and tension between community and the public was the shift that I needed in order to bring focus to my project. I developed this insight as my theoretical frame in chapter three.

Thinking about stable and shifting identities seems obvious in hindsight, but this data makes sense in light of scholarship on race. Many theorists define race as a multiple and unstable concept and experience, contingent on the collective and individual's particular historical contexts. Exploring, understanding, and transforming racially implicated identities may require writers to seek out multiple spaces due to race's multiple and shifting nature. This shift in looking at racial formation through the lens of community and the public also pointed me away from viewing my data through themes and categories and at race as moments of stability and change, and as movements through a writing ecology. Instead of organizing my chapters around themes, I based my data chapters (chapters four-six) on identity instantiations and movements.

In coding data, I realized I was taking what Porter and Sullivan describes as "snapshots of what is fundamentally a fluid set of events" (5). The lists of categories and codes could only take me so far in organizing data, but making sense of these images and

moments required me to go back and forth from participating, listening to participants, analyzing data, and drafting. It was the combined process of these components and my (many failed) recursive attempts to make sense of it all that afforded me insight into the formation of Asian-American identities. Throughout this process I strove to maintain ethical integrity by treating and seeing participants as people, rather than categories of data. Although my feelings of being too aligned with participants and the studied community were at times an issue, resulting in my own discomfort and inability to negotiate my academic and personal selves, I'm sure that this and my other unknown biases have informed this study. I do believe that an ethnography highlighting new technologies and Asian-American voices and narratives has been long overdue, and I hope my work shines a light on Asian Americans and, the Xanga community specifically, as a valuable collective from which to learn and to listen.

CHAPTER 3

"CLOSE-KNIT COMMUNITY" AND "COMMUNITY OF STRANGERS": THE PRODUCTION OF ASIAN-AMERICAN IDENTITIES AND RHETORIC(S) AT THE INTERSECTION OF COMMUNITY AND PUBLIC IMAGINARIES

In my research of Asian-American users on the social network site (SNS) Xanga, I discovered that participants' shifting experiences of their own ethnic and racial identities inform their writing acts and, conversely, participants' writing purposes influence their conceptions of writing spaces and audiences. As such, I read Xanga as a *writing ecology* that affords multiple and overlapping spaces, audiences, and writing identities, and can, as a result, accommodate participants' various ways of constructing and addressing race. I take the metaphor of a writing ecology from Jenny Edbauer's work "Unframing Models of Public Distribution," in which Edbauer theorizes the writing situation beyond a linear model of sender-receiver and complicates this model by showing how a writing ecology treats specific acts of writing as contingent upon previously circulating texts, the participants involved, and the interconnected spaces of encounter. In particular relevance to this study is Edbauer's claim that "writing is distributed across a range of processes and encounters" (13). The emphasis on "processes and encounters," rather than a physical location, provides me a frame for examining participants' writing motivations and the construction of their writing environment and imaginary as fundamentally connected; when one of these elements shift so do other aspects of this environment.

By approaching a digital site as a writing ecology, this study provides a more nuanced way for understanding online racial constructions. Race, as many scholars agree, is in itself a shifting and context-specific concept and experience (Lowe; Gilyard).

To write, explore, and circulate knowledge about race, then, may be done best in a writing ecology that is flexible and adaptable enough to afford the unstable nature and representations of race. For marginalized groups, exploring and affirming one's identity is not always possible in dominant environments where the rhetoric of colorblindness tends to be the default logic (Kolko). Therefore, SNSs such as Xanga are important for, in this case, Asian Americans to develop their own sense of a racialized identity, because Xanga provides them the technological, cultural, and social means to do so on their own terms. That is, race is shifting and complex, and writing about race may be done best in an ecology that can accommodate and express racial experiences more comprehensively (multimodal representations; multiple purposes and audiences; inclusions of other identities), while offering users the space to explore potentially risky identities in community and public contexts.

In this study, data suggest that participants readily shift between and overlap different conceptions of their writing spaces and audiences given their multiple and sometimes simultaneous writing purposes. Shifting and overlapping writing imaginaries provide participants a much more dynamic experience in their writing and reading about race. In addition, participants expressed that Xanga's community and public affordances have significant bearing on their continuous involvement and motivation to write, indicating that writers on this site are hyperaware of their various readers—an awareness inflected by race and ethnicity. Rather than examining community and public as separate arenas, I view the overlap and tension between community and public as necessary to the formation of an Asian-American identity for many of the participants and users on Xanga. I came to this conclusion after uncovering data that initially seemed at odds;

thirteen out of nineteen participants would reference "community" in their surveys and all eleven interviewed participants claimed or agreed that community has a significant role in their writing motivations and intentions. What I found initially puzzling is that many of the same participants also described Xanga's "public" as equally important to them as writers on this site. Instead of reading community and public as conflicting (or separate) data, I began to see that participants were signaling to me their conceptions of community and public as fundamentally interrelated in a way that attended to participants' multiple, and at times, conflicting understandings, experiences, and writings about race. For example, Bryan, a 19-year-old, "Taiwanese Asian"[16] male describes Xanga as, "a free forum and soapbox to anyone who wants to partake in it and one can decide how much attention s/he wants to attract at any time." A few sentences later, Bryan also describes Xanga as a place "for those who are in need of words of encouragement and support" (survey).

These various aspects of Xanga, as a public forum and a communal space of support, serve participants' desires to create writing that exceeds the limitations of a single genre, and indeed, a defined and limited identity. In writing to these imagined audiences, Bryan and other participants are able to gauge and revise their writing for effective and at times empowered public voices and identities, positions that have been historically denied Asian Americans (Lowe). On the other hand, the communal relationships afford participants a "safe zone," in which their own racial and ethnic

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[16] I attempt to portray participants how they would want to be represented in this study. Therefore, I place these self-identifying ethnic and racial descriptions in quotation marks. While "Asian" may seem an obvious and convenient term for many users on Xanga, some participants contest this assumption by responding to inquiries about their race with "Human" (Alexander, survey) or "Chinese(?)" (Aaron, survey). Also, "Asian" is an identity that I do not want to impose on participants, but rather, I include it to indicate that these identity constructions are participants' own perspectives.

experiences are recognized and affirmed through shared narratives and supportive comments, an experience that data strongly indicate is missing for participants elsewhere in their lives. For instance, in the blog titled, "My Response to 'Why Chinese Mothers Are Superior,'" Bryan critiques Amy Chua's excerpt in *The Wall Street Journal*,[17] by arguing that Chua's representations of Chinese parenting methods are narrow and promotes, in his words, "a false dichotomy" between the East and West (1/17/2011). By posting his own arguments against Chua, Bryan receives responses from both a public of strangers and from known community members. In his comment log, Bryan receives encouragement and affirmation that his writing is valued: "I love reading your replies to people. :) You're so clever & have a graceful manner about you. It makes me so happy, lol." (Commenter One). But in the same log, Bryan also receives comments that challenge his own writing and ideas: "I have a problem with your criticism of Why Chinese Mother's are superior because you have not read the book. Instead, you take the word of the Wall Street Journal who totally misrepresented what this book is about. I would suggest you actually read the book first before you criticize Amy Chua" (Commenter Two). Given varying responses ranging from being supportive to critical, I questioned what the writer valued in seemingly different audiences/readers. To ask this in a different way, what do users gain in receiving both encouraging and critical responses and from commenters varying from well-known friends to passing strangers?

In analyzing my data, I discovered that participants want both the stability and support a community provides, but also to be "seen" and recognized by a public. Such

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[17] Amy Chua is the author of *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*. Published in January 2011, her book ignited heated controversies over parenting methods that were ostensibly couched in cultural differences between the Chinese (Asian) way of raising children in strict households and the American way of childrearing that portrays parents as more "lax" with their children.

simultaneous affirmations and challenges allow users to perceive of themselves as positioned within a dynamic writing environment reflecting more closely how race and writing are experienced among various social and cultural arenas. But rather than being positioned as marginal or alienated (as many of them experience in other arenas in their lives), participants use community and public imaginaries to reposition themselves as active writers in rejecting, revising, and transforming their Asian-American identities.

This chapter, then, explores community and public affordances as two of the most salient aspects of Xanga as a writing ecology, how these aspects inform participants' writing and, hence, their constructions and transformations of their own and others' racialized identities. In addition, this study draws on participants' experiences and descriptions to define community and public as felt relationships, constructed (and at times temporary) places and spaces, and imaginaries acting to significantly orientate participants' writing. For participants, their Xanga community is made up of the online experience through which they feel like they are being supported and heard by other users who have maintained a meaningful presence as both a blogger and commenter. It is where the sharing and acknowledgement of narratives take place and circulate as a fundamental practice and value. And it is the culmination of events from which sentiments such as "close-knit" (Alexander, Geoff), "chock full of support and love" (Bryan), and "extended family" (Angeline, Geoff) emerge. Public, on the other hand, is an orientation toward any user on this site who is not part of the community; it describes the collective that is beyond the "close-knit" community but maintains its integrity as a Xanga public due to users' shared status of having a Xanga account. In fact, participants will associate Xanga's public with less intimate descriptions such as "strangers" (Chris,

Sonlay, utopia) and “general people” (Angeline, Coolmonkey). According to Aaron, it is “anyone [who] can join, so that makes them public.” This description, although ostensibly vague, reflects what many theorists argue is an essential condition for constituting a public (see Habermas and Weisser). Not only do participants suggest this understanding of the public, but they also demonstrate that such an orientation functions in considerably complex and vexed ways along with their community imaginary, and that both of these imaginaries play a significant role in how writers produce, resist, and transform Asian-American identities.

In section one, I look at how participants draw on humor and static images as rhetorical strategies to construct an insider-outsider dynamic that, in turn, helps them recognize who belongs in their community. I follow this section by interrogating the role that a “Community of Strangers” plays in orienting participants toward a public writing, audience, and self. The last section engages with Xanga’s specific technology and site, “Asian Diaspora,” to demonstrate how such sites merge community and public representations and space. By investigating how “Asian Diaspora” functions on Xanga, this study suggests that community and public intersect and overlap in complex ways in order to accommodate participants’ experiences and constructions of race.

Constructing Community

Participants’ consideration of community was something surprisingly unexpected in my data collection, but quickly became a concept that I found critical for understanding participants’ writing contexts/motivations and my larger project of interrogating the intersections among race/ethnicity, writing, and emerging technologies. I was particularly struck by responses to the surveys that included “community” or

descriptions of community because I did not ask participants to respond to questions directly addressing this topic, and I did not I plan to solicit participants' opinions on this matter. Yet thirteen out of nineteen participants who filled out surveys answered with "community" or community descriptors to my open-ended questions such as, "What motivates you to keep writing on Xanga?" and "How would you characterize or describe Xanga to a friend?"[18] While the amount of survey responses—thirteen—that were coded for community would indicate a need for closer examination, it was the qualitative nature of the responses that convinced me to pursue this line of inquiry, although I did not initially know where this questioning would lead me in my research. Participant responses in surveys came across as *positive* and *confident* when describing their/our community, such as "We're small and tight-knit" and "[Xanga is] a place that has a strong community" (Geoff, survey; Nick, survey). These specific imaginaries of community foster and mediate participants' relationship to others, and the continuous production of this community allows users to explore and construct their understanding of an Asian-American identity within a relatively "safe" place; users are constructing their racially- and ethnically- inflected identities for and with each other as digital narratives, and in turn, transforming and solidifying aspects of an Asian-American experience on their own terms.

"We're small and tight-knit": Relationships as Community

In analyzing community-coded data, it occurred to me that participants' willingness, desire, and, at times, immediacy to write about their identities, including their raced experiences, are very much tied to their relationships with other members.

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[18] See Appendix B for complete survey.

For example, when I asked Geoff, "What motivates you to keep writing on Xanga?" he responds, "The community, hands down. We're small and tight-knit, so we actually come to care about and have a vested interest in each other. I hope this study doesn't encourage a bunch of interlopers to come and try to destabilize everything we've got here." This particular passage reflects a sense of obligation that Geoff feels for others on the site, but he also seems to recognize an insider-outsider dynamic that helps to maintain the "close-knit" relationships he has forged with fellow members, a tongue-in-cheek reflection that also speaks to his defensive posture about "his" online community. Sharing in Geoff's sentiment is Chris, an active and well-known member who talked in his interview about confronting "stalkers" or "creeps" when they post inappropriate comments to some of the female members. He states, "... me being the nosy guy, I would just call them out or just tell them off, and see how they respond back..." I include Geoff and Chris' survey and interview because the boundaries of a community can be most visible when community norms and customs are breached. As John Logie points out, when a community is in danger of rupturing, it can reveal the conventions and rituals that bind it together. In the case of this Xanga community, racist remarks, lurking behavior, and directly inappropriate comments to women rub up against the members' collective and cultural conventions and can be met with members blocking the offender from personal sites, or worse, when the community publicly ostracizes the offender.

While users on this site tend to be open to new members, there seems little patience for users who repeatedly break the community's conventions of mutual respect and support, regardless of the person's race and various identity affiliations. Yet when it comes to users who intentionally level racist opinions against other members or users

who are deemed “stalkers,” the more established community members take these offenses seriously and are seen to collectively stand against perceived racists and stalkers. In fact, during my participation with Xanga I was able to witness the communal shunning of a user. Because this is a sensitive topic to some of the members on this site and because I did not ask for permission from some of the main people involved, I will refrain from using particularities that will hint at users’ identities. As a developing member of this community, I decided that it was important for me to attend the New York City “Xanga Meet” that took place during the summer of 2010. Alex, another participant, was one of the main organizers of this meet and was able to convince over 30 people from various states (people came from as far as California, New Mexico, and even from Canada) to visit New York City and meet Xangans in person. For many of the people who attended, including myself, this was my first time meeting Xangans live. While I cover Xanga Meets in detail in chapter two, the demographic of the group was mostly Asian and Asian American. After this meet, word quickly circulated on Xanga, on Xanga Zombies (a real-time, video chat that members often use to interact beyond Xanga’s blogging site), and on Facebook that a Caucasian male, “John,” was “hitting on” all the Asian women at the meet, and causing many of them to feel uncomfortable, particularly when John pushed alcohol onto and “cornered” some of the women. Furthermore, he went on to post inappropriate and sexually suggestive comments on their sites and posted pictures of them without their consent.

As word spread of this user’s behavior, members became increasingly incensed and their outrage was reflected in the postings that emerged over the next few weeks after the meet. In fact, one participant “Tom” who wishes to remain anonymous for only this

part of the dissertation noted that he recently had to block John from his Xanga site, since he was also leaving rude comments on Tom's site in regards to a more recent meet. In checking my own memories with Tom via email, Tom wrote, "How many comments...well, let's just say there are still references to him to this day haha. I know right after the last meet there was a picture that we all used to just comment to each other. A big section of that comment string (which went past 1,000 comments at least) was about him and how creepy he was to the women" (Email exchange, 7/21/11). Many of these comments denounced Tom as a stalker, described him as suffering from "Yellow Fever," and threatened to "kick his ass."

While most of these conversation threads occurred on Xanga and on Xanga Zombies, the one that I momentarily observed was located on Facebook.[19] I found the use of multiple sites striking; while some users "didn't care and [were] happily calling him out" on Xanga (according to Tom and Chris), others migrated to Facebook in order to ensure John's exclusion from their discussions about him. Since some of the members "met" each other at the Xanga Meet for the first time, the migration to Facebook acted like a filter so that an even more selective group began to develop on Facebook. To be fair, people who attended the New York Meet were already friending each other on Facebook after the meet, but before the John incident gained traction. But John functioned as a lightning rod topic and consequently helped the newly forming Facebook group to coalesce around a common issue. As Tom indicated in his follow-up email, over a thousand comments were made regarding this incident on Xanga. On Facebook,

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[19] This issue did not seem like something that I was going to engage in my research, so I followed this conversation on Facebook much more out of personal interest than for research reasons. In hindsight, I should have considered this conversation as it emerged on both Xanga and Facebook as potential data. The conversation on Xanga is lost due to time and deletion.

the numbers were somewhat less and made up a thread that is over 500 comments long (Facebook, 9/4/2011). Along with the massive amounts of comments, the use of multiple SNSs for engaging this incident speaks to the momentum that John created for this community.

The move from Xanga to Facebook makes sense in light of what a few participants observed when comparing Xanga to other SNSs. In particular, Sonlay posits, "Facebook does have a community, but you come in with a community already" (Instant Messaging Interview, 2/28/2011). Mark, another participant, writes in his survey, "I do use Facebook, but mainly for my academic contacts… I try to keep things separate, but inevitably I have some overlap from Xanga onto my Facebook. Interestingly enough, my Xanga friends are amongst my most frequent posters on my Facebook page, despite the fact that I have nearly 1000 'friends' on FB." If the circulation of this particular conversation was meant to exclude the "offender," it follows that the function of this textual engagement served a different purpose other than to publicly shun John, or at least to shun him directly. As a perceived threat, John worked as an object of orientation and unified the members on the site around particular racial norms, and effectively reasserted community boundaries and users' status as belonging members. Users who were privy to both sites were able to discuss John on Facebook, but bring back to Xanga a stronger connection between those involved in such discussions. In effect, the use of Facebook did not take members away from Xanga but helped to define and enhance a stronger community on Xanga, as evidenced by the continuing comments to this day. The sentiment that Xanga has a better community is particularly strong in the data analysis, where many of the participants directly compare Xanga to Facebook. As a case in point,

AJ observes that "Xanga feels more personal and less professional, of sorts" and views Facebook as truly more of a networking site lacking the personal experience Xanga affords users (survey). The professional and networking overtones on Facebook, as a consequence, serve a different function than the more "expressive" and "personal" relationships that participants experience on Xanga.

In reading Geoff and Chris's previous responses within the context of the John incident, their writing reflects a strongly felt connection to the people who are more than just transient visitors and, as Geoff points out, potential "interlopers," but as what many of these participants consider close friends. In fact, Geoff goes as far as describing the community as an "extended family," and data show that many of the community members agree with Geoff's assessment (survey). Indeed, participants' sentiment is supported by the substantial activity surrounding similar incidents threatening to rupture the community and its norms, such as when one particular user posited the superiority of white people (my experience, validated by Coolmonkey (2/21/2011) and Sonlay in interviews (2/28/2011)). Yet such events can also function to forge stronger connections between community members by uniting the members around a common crisis, goal, or belief, and mark who belongs and who ought to be excluded. While this particular incident remains inconclusive and problematic for me (in hindsight, I would like to have interviewed John for his perspective on this incident), I believe that communal contexts are important for micro formations of race. For marginalized groups, exploring and affirming one's identity is not always possible in dominant environments. This is not to say Xanga is free of hate and racially insensitive materials, but this smaller community, existing within the larger Xanga context, affords users a "safer" place to write about who

they are, and this tends to include their racial experiences and beliefs. For example, I wonder how "Yellow Fever," an insult leveled at non-Asians for their overt preference and fetish (typically sexual in nature) for people of Asian descent, would be accepted if this community was made up of predominantly white members.

Through John, we get a sense of what is *not* the Asian-American community. But defining what "Asian American" *is* requires unpacking a complex intersection of concepts, beliefs, and experiences. As with any major category of identity, Asian American has been subject to change due to historical events and time. As Lisa Lowe maps out, Asian American as a racialized category has been in process since Asians arrived in American seeking work in the last half of the 19th century (see also Takaki). Asian American as a racial category remains tinged with a history of "racialized labor," informing its political focus and aim to unify ethnic Asians and build coalition across other racial collectives during the civil rights era (Lowe 25-27). While participants may not see their identities through this historical lens, their experiences do speak to these broader cultural patterns. For instance, current labor such as the medical or technological fields remains raced (Aaron, Alexander, Angeline, Chris, and Coolmonkey). Angeline writes in her survey, "I was often classified as the 'smart Asian girl' in my classes. Asian Americans are often stereotyped as hard-working, diligent, and intelligent students, applying to prestigious universities, and often aiming for a position in the competitive medial field." Partly defining Asian American in the community are not these stereotypes in themselves, but how members share the collective experience of being read through these stereotypes. Angeline, in fact, sees this as a positive stereotype, but Chris and Sonlay do not want to be seen as just "book smart" or "nerdy" (Chris); they want to

be seen more than one dimensional, such as being funny (Sonlay). These shared experiences can be seen in the list of tropes and patterns I created in my data collection such as intergenerational and intercultural tensions; affirming, rejecting, or complicating Asian images in the media; whiteness; and experiences of estrangement from ethnic enclaves and public arenas (see Appendix C for full list). These tropes function as the "organizing tool[s]" of cultural and social relationships, influencing how race forms among the micro-level interactions between community members (Lowe 70).

In the post-civil rights era, Asian American continually lost its impetus for political mobilization and became a project to claim "American" through cultural and aesthetic means. But global changes induced by wars and economic shifts highlighted the exclusion of Asian-born Asians from American-born Asians, excluding South Asians and Southeast Asians from belonging to Asian-American identity and culture (Ty and Geollnicht "Introduction"). Historically and currently, Asian American has been characterized by otherness, but in the current environment this term paradoxically functions as both a diametric identity to the dominant or held up as an example of ethnic progression as theorized by Nazli Kibria: "[A]mong the particular conditions that Asian Americans bring to the puzzle of race and new immigrant integration is a position of being "a part yet apart" from the dominant society. As I have described it, a complex confluence of inclusion and exclusion characterizes their relationships with the dominant society" (13). For the purposes of my project, I find Kibria's literal and metaphorical characterization, "a part yet apart" key to defining Asian American, not only because this is how dominant culture and agendas (the macro) perceive of Asians and Asian

Americans, but I see this, also, as the discursive and ideological strip between the macro and micro where participants struggle to define their own sense of Asian American.

By discursive and ideological, I mean to capture participants' writing and rhetorical acts positioning them in affirming, contesting, and transforming relationships to the macro. While this characterization and tension constitutive of Asian-American identity plays out differently for writers implicated by it, all participants in this study attend to this tension. Indeed, I believe that most, if not all Asian Americans have to contend with this identity whether they choose to do so and/or due to how their bodies signal Asian-ness, Other. For this reason, the studied community is such a significant space for members because of how it allows their Asian characteristics (in the list I provided above) to exist as shared experiences or as normal aspects of themselves (a topic I examine in chapter six). While scholars like Lowe and Takaki provide us the "bigger picture" for how to understand historically informed cultural patterns like racialized labor, examining participant data show us how these formations of race are engaged on a micro level: "The boundaries and definitions of Asian American culture are continually shifting and being contested from pressures both 'inside' and 'outside' of the Asian-origin community" (Lowe 66).

"Post Something Absurdly Racist": Humor and Static Images as Community Borders

Member's sense of belonging on the "inside" of the equation is an essential aspect for members' willingness to share their stories on Xanga. In exploring this very subject of online communities, Nessim Watson argues that, "We should begin thinking of community as a product not of shared space, but of shared *relationships* among people" (120). Therefore when participants state that "the community" is what motivates them to

write on Xanga, I also hear in their declarations a reference to the relationships they have discovered and developed with other members on this site. More so, I also hear my participants speaking of themselves as insiders, as being accepted as the dominant in this group, rather than the marginal or token, a position that allows them more freedom to both make jokes about and criticize outsiders for suffering from "Yellow Fever" without the fear of being marginalized for such comments, which can be construed as being overly sensitive or hinging on identity politics in other dominant arenas.

Another way to read this is to consider how the use of humor and satire function to delineate the insider-outsider dynamic. Knowing who gets to make jokes about the Asian/Asian-American experience and who then "gets it" offers insight into how members belong to this community. For instance, Coolmonkey, an ethnically "Taiwanese/Chinese" and racially "Asian" male in his 20s can be found writing in what he sees as a "tongue-in-cheek" style of writing. When I first came across Coolmonkey's blog, "The Featured Section Should Not Be Forgotten," I was confused by how to read it due to its ostensibly overt racist and sexist overtones. In critiquing how some blogs are posted to the "featured list"[20] on Xanga's homepage due to users' marketing skills rather than on the merits of compelling writing, Coolmonkey posted a "how-to" for getting featured. He writes,

> It became too easy to game the system. All you had to do was:
> 1) Post something absurdly racist
> 2) Be a time-stamp fiend
> 3) Friend hoard
> 4) Imply you're going to kill yourself and brood about how shitty your life is
> 5) Post pictures of Asian girls

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[20] Blogs picked for the "Featured List" show up on Xanga's homepage and also functions as the "sign-in" page. Consequently, these blogs get exposed to a broader reading public and receive more traffic/visitors.

> and once in awhile...
> 6) Your shit is actually worth reading
> (Blog, 4/20/2010)

Some of these points struck me as initially insensitive. I was even more confounded when most of the comments agreed with Coolmonkey's point regarding the stale featured blogging list, but there were very little responses to his "to do" list other than to make additional jokes about posting photos of girls. I tried not to take this blog personally, since this list implied that the visual cues marking me as female and Asian were being used as possibly thoughtless rhetorical strategies to gain more visitors. My response was coming from an outsider's position where the satire and intended humor was lost on me. How did other members read this blog? What was Coolmonkey's intention in writing this blog? And what would Coolmonkey's and commenters' responses say about the community? It was from interviewing both a commenter/participant and Coolmonkey that I understood that being an insider was much more complex than making or getting a joke, it also had to do with the context and culture of the community in which the joke emerged and can be read as such.

Angeline, an ethnically "Taiwanese-American" and racially "Asian" 20-year-old female commenter and participant in this study responded to this blog by writing, "Hey, hey. I post pictures of hot white girls too." Outsiders coming across this response may read it as funny or, rather, defensive of "white girls" as excluded from being desirable in the conception of the collective gaze on this site. But in our interview, Angeline noted that her response was "making fun" of another member who typically "you know, write[s] a long cool blog and then post[s] a pic of a hot asian chick..." She goes on to say that people who post pictures of "hot girls" do so because it helps "filter out who actually

reads your shit" from those who will only visit a site to view pictures (Instant Messaging Interview, 2/24/11). According to Angeline, a member who reads Coolmonkey's blogs on a regular basis, pictures of "hot girls" are being used not only to attract more visitors, but to also separate the true readers and members of the community from possible "creepers" and strangers beyond the community. She summarizes, "the people who actually read your blog will comment on the content of it rather than say 'omg, hot girl'" (Online Messaging Interview, 2/24/11). In turn, extended comments signal to Angeline with whom she should develop and maintain relationships, illustrating how visual rhetoric operates to foster reciprocal writing acts.

Angeline offers insight into how the particular use of static visuals, as a function afforded on this site (as with most sites these days), work to separate the community from the broader Xanga public when juxtaposed with writing. This belief is also reflected by other participants who talk about the "real" readers and commenters on their site, and, in turn, the members who are seen and treated as part of the community. For instance, in asking Coolmonkey about the difference between using images and writing, he refers me to another one of his blogs that he describes as "a post where I hardly wrote anything of substance," but "logged in 560 views." He finds this a "monstrous number" and attributes this result to posting a picture of himself in which he asks for advice on whether a pink tie causes him to "look gay" (Instant Messaging Interview, 2/21/2011). His experiences with how static images function on this site, then, informs his later blog on "The Featured Section," and layers it with new meanings and multiple readings, depending on the reader's position on Xanga. That is, a community member most likely would know that Coolmonkey is using sarcasm and satire to call out and call attention to

users who “game the system” so that their writing will be featured. But as an outsider, a stranger to the community, Coolmonkey’s subversive humor may not have translated as intended, since knowledge about Coolmonkey’s “tongue-in-cheek” style of writing and how pictures can function in this community context influences one’s reading. In addition, I can also interpret Coolmonkey’s intention as racially marking outsiders as white by catching them with “Yellow Fever.” In other words, users who are white and are intending to use this site for fetishized reasons would know that this blog is addressing them. As a result, they may also read this as a caution from the community. In effect, such rhetorical stances work to police visitors with potentially disruptive motives.

If these positions—insider as community member and outsider as part of the broader public —informs how one interprets Coolmonkey’s blog, it follows that these positions also inform how one will read race from this blog as well as other acts of racially and ethnically inflected writing occurring on this site. Because participants demonstrate that they understand this distinction between “real readers” and others, it also informs how they write. When Angeline comments, “Hey, hey. I post pictures of hot white girls too,” she is acting from the belief that pictures of Asian girls do work to attract more traffic to one’s blog, but she can be read as also critiquing Coolmonkey’s fifth point based on its racial exclusion. A stranger reading this comment, again, may see this as a defense of white women and may even be enticed to link to Angeline’s site. And, upon arriving at Angeline’s site, her position as an “Asian woman” posting pictures of white and Asian women can result in what Angeline has noted: users visiting sites to view pictures with little regard to the text. But I also see the possibility that some users,

who may initially intend on viewing pictures, would also go on to read Angeline's blogs in which Angeline writes about being bisexual while growing up in a strict Christian family. Her blogs about these experiences directly contest the assumption that bisexual people are "promiscuous" and challenges readers to understand sexuality in more inclusive ways: "It isn't clear-cut and often times I simply prefer to refer to myself as just queer or gay" (Blog, 12/16/2009).

As a "Taiwanese-American Asian" bisexual, Angeline promotes a more heterogeneous understanding of Asian Americans, one that also includes various sexualities as part of the Asian-American identity and experience. In fact, one commenter signals that s/he learned something about her/himself from reading Angeline's post by responding, "Pansexual. I like that. I didn't know there was a word to describe me. That would be me. Thanks!" (Commenter Three). Community members like Coolmonkey and Chris already know Angeline's position on sexuality, but strangers would be confronted with writing challenging them to rethink the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality in more inclusive ways, or, if they happen to be "pansexual," reading Angeline's blog becomes a way of recognizing and affirming their identity not as an isolated incident but as a shared and accepted experience, lending a more stable sense of their identities as Asian *and* pansexual. This intersection between race and sexuality is particularly underscored when I asked Angeline to explain her "hot white girls" comment. She states, "i was just joking around since it's common knowledge that xanga is pretty much dominated by asian people and people with asian girl fetishes lol" (Instant Messaging Interview, 2/24/2011). In knowing that her visitors may have Asian fetishes, Angeline's writing can be read as even more subversive because such people will be

exposed to a writer who states "I am angry today," in regards to other less inclusive posts and perspectives on bisexuality. Such direct statements from a user like Angeline may work to disrupt visitors' expectations of their "reading," and can ultimately challenge them to re-see Angeline on her own terms, as someone who is not just watched but also has enough agency to do some watching and to forcefully speak back to other users.

As my data suggest, the insider-outsider dynamic serves multiple purposes of maintaining this online community. And depending on how users are positioned, blogs can be interpreted in varied ways. How race is constructed and understood, then, is also a function of where a user stands vis-à-vis this community. For community members versed in their cultural knowledge about "interlopers," they (Aaron, Alex, Chris, Geoff, Jose, Matt, and Nick) migrated to a different SNS, effectively shifting their digital writing space altogether while simultaneously fostering and strengthening a sense of community on Xanga. Facebook, in this case, acted as a filter to block the perceived outsider and cultural offender, John, from asserting his "Yellow Fever" as an imposition to the conversation community members had elsewhere, but paradoxically this also strengthened the relationships among fellow members. Furthermore, participants demonstrate that static images can act as a filter against a transient public who may only be interested in viewing pictures of "Asian girls," thus separating the community members who are seen to thoughtfully read and comment on the texts. The visual use of race as a rhetorical strategy to initially appeal to a broad readership and then to filter this audience along insider and outsider lines is a surprising occurrence on this site, since it can be easily dismissed as reasserting and promoting Asian fetishes. But upon closer examination of this visual rhetoric, participants are using static images in more

complicated ways than I initially thought; because they know that there is a prevalent Asian fetish occurring on this site, playing into this desire and stereotype helps writers to know and separate their fellow community members from people like John. In other words, race is constructed to function as a boundary that delineates insiders and outsiders for members in this community. Participants' shared desires for wanting to be read by a receptive public ("e-fame") and potential community members, but not wanting the potential of negative attention impinging on their community and writing, for wanting to be acknowledged in both visual and textual ways, but not wanting to be fetishized, depict the tension between the public and community, resulting in complex productions of both visual and textual rhetorical strategies.

In the chapter, "Orientating Orientalism," Wendy Chun theorizes the boundaries of cyberspace through Orientalism and from a cyberpunk perspective. In arguing that Orientalism permeates cyberspace because it renders the disorientating experience of cyberspace through a culturally entrenched logic, Chun states that "The dream of bodiless subjectivity must be accompanied by bodiless representivity. Since its very inception, then, cyberspace—as orientalist heterotopia—has perpetuated and relied on differences that it claims to erase" (18). That is, how is the un-representable represented? How does one call space into being and signify space when space is also a constructed ideology online? (Chun argues that "cyberspace" is a misnomer because there is no "space," but a literary construction that was adopted to describe what we now know as cyberspace.) To extrapolate from Chun's work, images of "Asian girls" can be seen to *orientate* the dominant (read: white, male) users' position as such, because it assures the dominant subjectivity as the bodiless, invisible observer and the observed as embodied and racially

fetishized. "Asian girls," in short, orientate online users in cyberspace by employing racial difference as the boundary between the observer and the observed. Yet my study provides a look at how stereotypical racial constructions are being used by the observed and fetishized, by Asian Americans like Angeline, to exclude the dominant position and gaze because these dominant users ultimately fail to literally and figuratively read beyond the image. That Coolmonkey and Angeline post pictures of others and themselves to attract community and public attention indicates their shared assumptions of how race works in their space. Rather than not posting pictures, another option they can take, Coolmonkey and Angeline choose to engage with the visual as an opportunity to challenge how users "look" at Asian Americans by challenging their expectations for being on the site (Coolmonkey) or using text to confront users' choices to engage for fetish reasons (Angeline).

"Community of Strangers"/Public of Strangers

I first took note of the phrase, "community of strangers" when I interviewed Sonlay, a 22-year-old "Laotian, Thai, Chinese, Vietnamese Asian" male (Instant Messaging Interview, 2/28/2011). In our interview, I asked Sonlay to explain why he believes Xanga has such a close community. He states, "Having a system that allows you to relate or get to know others helps." This system, as he goes on to explain, is made up of particular technological functions such as the "recommendation feature" that lets users suggest blogs to other subscribers and the "Featured List" (Coolmonkey mentions this in the previous section). Sonlay goes as far as to argue that Tumblr's microblogging context is limiting (microblogging sites set limits on text and/or data), when compared to Xanga's unlimited textual and visual data affordances. Other sites' limitations, due to

technology or convention (Facebook does not seem to include lengthy writing acts although there is not a limit as to how much text/data a person can post), are reasons why Sonlay says, “You rarely find any post with depth” on these other sites. But when I invited Sonlay to extend on what he means by “system” in light of his comparisons, he offers a striking reflection of Xanga as a complex and flexible writing environment that goes beyond community affordances and relationships, which Xanga’s particular “system” fosters and maintains:

> Sonlay: Xanga are strangers
> Sonlay: The only thing you know about them is through their writings and posts
> Sonlay: Facebook does have a community, but you come in with a community already. (i.e., friends, coworkers, family)
> Sonlay: Xanga is a community of strangers on the internet who find similarities and unique differences between one another.
> Sonlay: Both contain the community feature, but the great thing with Xanga is that you experience others through writing instead of the face to face contact.
> Me: So, given what you just wrote, can you describe to me what you mean by community on Xanga?
> Me: (or just keep going with whatyou just said, since you are beating me to the punch)\
> Sonlay: haha
> Sonlay: Xanga is just a community of strangers pretty much
> Sonlay: a community of online friends

Sonlay’s movement to simultaneously include “strangers” and “online friends” in his conception of Xanga seems to pose a contradiction; these terms imply and categorize people as unknown (strangers) or known (friends or community). How can there be a community of strangers if strangers are, by definition, outsiders to a known community? Furthermore, how does this construction of the community as strangers and as a more public audience serve writers on this site?

These questions are partly answered when Sonlay attempts to resolve for me the "strong" and "rare" community (survey) he also experiences within the broader "community of strangers." Simply put, Sonlay does not perceive this as a conflict even when I underscore the distinction between strangers and community. Instead, Sonlay writes, "It's like our own high school 'clique'" as his response to my apparent confusion. "High School" is also used by Alexander (In-person Interview, 1/6/2011) and Chris (Skype Interview, 12/17/2010) to describe their "public" experiences on Xanga, and in looking back on the data, I discovered that high school works well as a metaphor for describing how participants can transition along a spectrum of community and public without seeing or experiencing these movements as problematic. For instance, Chris notes in his interview, "It's like high school, almost. Like you're in that clique and then there's your groupies." And as with high school performances, Sonlay and Chris know that members of their own "clique" (or community) are most likely to witness and engage their writing. Yet, students outside of the clique are still related to the broader community by virtue of being students of the high school. Analogously, participants in this study perceive users outside of their "tight-knit" community as part of a broader community by virtue of having a Xanga account, and Sonlay and Chris also know that they are performing to potential strangers beyond their immediate Xanga community when they blog and respond to others.

An account with Xanga provides the common denominator to all users whether they are unknown or known on a more intimate basis with the participants in this study, but this distinction between the tight-knit community and the community of strangers proves to be more significant when participants reveal what they value in their acts of

addressing a community of strangers. For instance, Bryan writes, "I decided to stay on Xanga for the community and the coziness: I enjoy having others read my writing while maintaining a comfortable degree of anonymity myself" (survey). The desire for strangers to read one's narratives is particularly pointed with utoppia, an "Asian Asian" female (undisclosed age) participant, and her response to the survey question, "What motivates you to keep writing on Xanga?" utoppia writes, "For the past year or so, I've written less about myself and more about my friend because I like observing people and see what *complete strangers* have to say about certain situations me or my friends encounter" (my emphasis). Similar to Bryan's reflection on anonymity and utoppia's desire to know strangers' reactions to her writing, Chris also expresses that on Xanga he can be "free" to say and be what he wants, because "they [the public] know nothing about you. They only know what you put up" (Skype Interview, 12/17/2010). Maintaining anonymity among strangers is a pattern that appears throughout the data, and other participants like Coolmonkey and Nick also speak to this writing position and identity that relates to a more abstract and amorphous audience.

Given such data, it appears that I was initially interpreting Sonlay's passage from a different position than was intended by some of the participants. In other words, I thought that Sonlay's conception of "community of strangers" is due to his misunderstanding of the terms community and strangers. But in considering Michael Warner's "public of strangers" and other participant data, I reread "community of strangers" as the other side of the coin to "public of strangers." That is, Chris and other participants are not so much concerned about reading or defining users beyond their immediate "clique," but, instead, their perception of a "community of strangers" had

more to do with how they imagined an unknown public and potential community would *read* and *define* them as users on this site. This shift and awareness of self as being read by strangers is subtle but demonstrates why participants point to anonymity when they or I brought up notions of public. Participants are, in effect, demonstrating that they are not only aware of a *strange* (unknown) audience, but also how strangers may be reading them; they read themselves from the position of the public and of *looking in* at the community and, hence, of looking in at themselves as part of a community of strangers.

While participants are using racially specific humor and coded images as rhetorical strategies to identify who belongs in their community, data also suggest that users are highly invested in writing to reach a public audience. In fact, more than half the participants interviewed used the words "public" or "strangers" to describe their Xanga audience, and whom they conceive of addressing when they write (Aaron, AJ, Angeline, Bryan, Coolmonkey, Chris, Nick, utoppia, and Sonlay). Instead of dismissing data on publics as tangential, it appears that participants conceive of their audience and writing environment as less intimate and more public when they describe themselves as anonymous. The desire to be anonymous and, yet, heard by others is different than how participants attribute their experiences of closeness and support to their "tight-knit" community, and demonstrates how differing motivations are connected to specific niches of participants' writing environments and imaginaries. And, as participants go on to show, such motivations connected to their public constructions are just as important as belonging to a "tight-knit" community. In addition, participants place their desire to be anonymous in tension with, in their own words, being an "attention whore" or having "e-fame" (Angeline, Chris, Coolmonkey, and Nick). In theory users can be well-known by

other users on this site and still maintain a measure of anonymity, but as participants illustrate, community obligations and conventions can result in participants feeling censored or limited, particularly when online interactions translate to offline socializing, like with meets (Chris, Coolmonkey).

In the case of Angeline, she believed that readers may subject her to accusations of "lying" or being inauthentic because of her perceived identity shift from being a lesbian to her more recent decision to be in a relationship with a man: "I feel like I owe at least some people an explanation. For my friends who've read my other entries, I really had to ponder my sexuality for a long, long time and honestly I still cannot define myself" (Blog, 10/9/2010). But if Angeline was only concerned with addressing people close to her, it strikes me as odd that she took down previous blogs; her more regular visitors and friends, by Angeline's admission, already know about these previous posts. Therefore, in addressing friends, why did she take down writing they have already read? In our interview, I was able to ask Angeline why she took down her previous blogs, which included her reflections on growing up confused about her sexuality, as tied to a "Taiwanese-Asian American" identity and "strict" Christian family. The following is an excerpt from our exchange:

> Angeline: because when I looked at my footprints, there were people who would go through every single page i had open [on public settings] and that made me annoyed
> Linh: like me? ☺
> […]
> Angeline: nah, like bots or people with empty xangas
> (Instant Messaging Interview, 2/24/11)

Although I was half-joking with Angeline, I did see myself as part of the public who was perusing her site with a research agenda in mind. The ease of being able to hit the

"Previous Posts" button and read through users' histories is something that is not lost on Angeline (or me) as reflected by her statement, "like bots or people with empty xangas."[21] I believe that in her desire to maintain her privacy with new readers, Angeline decided to take down some of her previous posts so that her history is no longer accessible to an unknown audience, since these blogs will most likely matter to people who do not have knowledge of Angeline's history.

It makes sense in general terms that Internet users are working along a spectrum of public and private spaces and imaginaries, but privacy is not what Angeline or other participants on Xanga are actually seeking, at least not in the way that writing in a diary affords writers. Being heard by strangers is something that participants highly value, and therefore, participants' desire to be anonymous speaks to being heard while allowing them some degree of being *unknown* by others. That is, this sense of "unknown" or anonymity from other parts of one's life is not quite the same as being private because the anonymous writing position allows users to be heard/read by strangers on the terms of their digitally constructed identity (Aaron, Chris, Coolmonkey, and Nick), whereas privacy closes users off from the possibility of being exposed to strangers. In other words, participants express a strong need to be known and heard by strangers, yet they want their writing self to be separated from other arenas of their lives and this can include, at times, the community that they are part of on Xanga.

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[21] "Empty Xangas" are users with accounts but without any known or significant presence on Xanga. These users are often perceived as having negative intentions of accessing accounts to view sites without being held accountable for their comments or their possible stalking behavior.

Aaron reflects well the intersections between being "free" and heard in his anonymity, which provides him the separation from other arenas in his life. In our interview, I asked Aaron if he sees his writing on Xanga different than elsewhere in his life. He says, "I feel like there's more freedom involved. I have more freedom. Hmm… the other place, I mean the other ah… my other writing mainly for work, so with work you have to be a little more professional" (Skype Interview, 2/13/2011). This theme of being freer to say and be what he wants to be is also prevalent in his survey and blogs. In his survey, Aaron responds to, "What motivates you to keep writing on Xanga?" by expressing, "I want to share my life, my stories with an audience because I rarely get to share my feelings with people I know in real life." While I interpret Aaron's statement as wanting to be heard, it is in analyzing his blogs that I recognized just how significant it is for Aaron and many of the participants on this study to experience the "freedom" of being anonymous-yet-heard.

I came across Aaron's blog, "Thank you" early in my participation on Xanga, and thought that it was an interesting post because Aaron titled this blog in both English and Japanese characters, wrote his first paragraph in Japanese characters, and then included the following:

> I was watching a lot of Japanese drama lately so when I wrote the little paragraph above, all my thoughts were in Japanese as well. you know, from my early teen years to my early twenties I would never have imagined I would write this post saying that I am grateful for her or that I love her […] Thank you for being such a strong and caring mom… sorry I didn't realize it sooner, I am such an idiot. (10/4/2010)

But as I got to know Aaron from following his writing and at the Xanga Meet, I realized that Aaron is not Japanese. He self identifies as "Chinese" as his race and "Chinese(?)" as his ethnicity in his survey. In our interview, I was able to ask Aaron about this blog.

Because Aaron noted that he initially wrote this entry in a journal, I was particularly interested in why he decided to copy this piece from his handwritten journal to an online site as well as his decision to write in Japanese. He notes, "Actually, I originally wrote it in my own journal. So, I think writing about it [online] makes me, you know, accept it more." In underscoring to Aaron that "she [Aaron's mother] can't read Japanese, and knowing that she won't be able to read the rest of the piece too [although it is addressed to his mother], but other people get to read it on Xanga," I asked, "What is the value of that for you?":

> Aaron: I think I just want to be heard.
> Me: You just want to be heard?
> Aaron: Yeah. Without having a reply saying, "You should get married."
> [We both laugh.]
> (Skype Interview, 2/13/2011)

Aaron's desire to be heard by others while maintaining space apart from his familial and community relationships is also particularly striking in another blog. In "little by little… you're dead to me," Aaron reflects on growing up poor with a father who was "addicted to gambling." He writes, "As a kid I never knew how to confront him about it because I was afraid of getting beat even though I absolutely loathe what he was doing." He follows this later by asserting, "But I am not that little kid anymore, I am not afraid to confront him about it… it was easy at first but I spoke up (but I never raised my voice… I always spoke calmly, it's the asian thing about not raising your voice with your parents even if you want to kick them in the face)" (5/28/2010). Aaron's admission that "it's the asian thing" to not raise one's voice to one's parents is noteworthy. While many participants concur that Xanga is constituted of predominately Asian and Asian-American users (Angeline, Bryan, Coolmonkey, Mark, and Nick), this inclusion of what

Asians "do" can be interpreted as writing that is oriented toward an unknown public, one that includes non-Asians in race and/or culture. In reflecting on his fraught childhood, Aaron constructs an identity that demonstrates to an unknown and public audience how one acts Asian. In addition, I asked Aaron why he posted this particular piece on Xanga, and he simply answered, "I want to tell my story" (Skype Interview, 2/13/2011). Yet his motivations for doing so are not as simple as he suggests, because this story emerges through his need to be heard, albeit by strangers.

Furthermore, Aaron's construction of a Japanese identity through his language use leads visitors to think he is Japanese, and through this alternative writing position he is able to recreate his experiences that remain productively unmoored to the rest of his life for himself and strangers. Aaron also notes that he knows only one Japanese member on Xanga and admits that not many members, and perhaps none, would be able to read his Japanese writing. This indicates that Aaron is not so much concerned with whether readers understand parts of his writing, but that the "presentation" of his writing of Japanese can be a reflection on his own identity. Aaron confirms this analysis when he tells me in our interview that he was always "fascinated" with Japanese culture and went out of his way to study in Japan in college. Through this experience, Aaron discloses that he tries to actively learn Japanese and its culture in order to adopt the culture as his own. Such data suggest that strangers, or an unknown, public audience are fundamental to how Aaron and other users are conceiving of their writing environment, one in which they can explore racial identities in complicated ways and without the typical constraints imposed by established relationships and social conventions.

Understanding that strangers are "witnessing" his acts of writing lends participants like Chris a sense of being heard by others, but in a way that does not risk his more established community relationships or obligations. In reference to the public, Chris states, "People will know. I don't have to hide it. It's something that I… I'm not hiding anything" whereas in a community setting Chris "feels intertwined with them." In a collective of known members (on or offline), Chris believes that his history of depression, his "baggage" will color how people view and treat him, because it is read as always and already part of his identity. Therefore, the community of strangers provides him the "freedom" to explore himself as a person, as an Asian American, and without the fear of being judged or limited before he even begins writing, because strangers will only know what he "puts up." But contrary to framing himself in a positive light, what Chris publishes are at times very conflicted and difficult to read; he does not hide his "baggage," but, rather, he confesses in his interview that he is a "complete open book" when he envisions writing to a public audience. In analyzing Chris' blogs in which he recounts his past struggles with anxiety and depression, and his arguably abusive relationship between him and his mother, it does seem to me that Chris holds back very little in portraying himself to his readers (9/23/2010; 5/27/2010).

While I initially expected that being anonymous would provide participants the opportunity to perform significantly different identities, all the participants who mentioned being anonymous also stated that this position and writing role afforded them the ability to be more honest and more themselves than in other arenas in their lives. Coolmonkey, for example, asserts that "the relative anonymity allows me to say things that I wouldn't say on facebook." He goes on to say that such anonymity is "very

important" to him because "there'd be a self-imposed censorship" (Instant Messaging Interview, 2/21/2011). In analyzing Angeline, Aaron, and Chris' data, it appears to me that this affordance of being anonymous is vital to their acts of storytelling that engage with racial identities. Sexuality, interracial experimentations, and depression are not topics that are readily discussed in relation to Asian Americans, by Asian Americans in public arenas (see Ono and Pham). A community of strangers, then, provides users the environment in which race is explored without risking relationships elsewhere. This public orientation also provides users opportunities to see themselves as being "heard." Indeed, such recognition on their own terms, and by "strangers," is valuable, because it signals that their voice and identity matters in a social and cultural order that is too often reverberating with voices coming from dominant, "white" bodies.

The Racial Constructions of Identity in Community Places and Public Spaces

The very nature of "Asian Diaspora"[22] explains why members seek out both community and public audiences simultaneously. Its description, in fact, destabilizes ethnicity and race even as it reinforces it, similar to how community and publics offer racial identities to the writers:

> **Asian** North **American** culture has spanned the continent and become an accepted ethnicity in itself. As young adults growing up under the hyphenated title, whether it be Chinese-Canadian or Korean-**American**, many of us are still struggling to form our own identity between East and West. Come unravel your words, stories, experiences, humour, rantings or random ramblings with fellow yellows! (original emphasis)

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[22] In chapter two, I described "Asian Diaspora" as a blogring that allows users to create and self-select a topic (and collective) of interest. It can also be described as a blog profile that highlights an interest rather than a user, e.g "Amateur Cooking."

Initially, I picked "Asian Diaspora" because I was interested in the formation of Asian American (or Asian North American, as a more encompassing term) as a result of online textual and visual rhetoric. At the initial stages of my research I believed that given "Asian Diaspora's" description, this blogring would expose me to Asian-American writers who were, indeed, "struggling to form [their] own identity" within an ethnic and diasporic context. While not all of the participants in this study are part of "Asian Diaspora," I discovered that this blogring played a key role in offering many of the well-known and established members of the community an initial access point (technologically and identity-wise) for connecting with users who share similar backgrounds so that they can, in their words, "seek out" and "relate" to others[23] (see also Adam Banks).

While "Asian Diaspora's" description invites a collective and collaborative exploration of identity, it is itself a highly complex and contested site of representation. For example, "Asian Diaspora" attributes ethnicity to the term, "Asian North American culture" and sets up a distinction between "East and West." Although the title references race, the description does not directly state "race" and does not explain why "North" is included. Does "North" geographically distinguish diasporic groups between a Northern and Southern hemisphere, or perhaps between American versus European Asians? Does the inclusion of an "East and West" binary recast identities along an Orientalist model by pointing out the geographical and cultural extremes, differences, and the foreign versus "civilized" subject positions that separate the East and West in the Western imaginary

[23] For a more comprehensive account of why I started with "Asian Diaspora" as my initial research community and site, but expanded my "community" beyond "Asian Diaspora," please refer to chapter two.

(Said)? How does the claim of a “hyphenated title” and a struggle for identity address/invoke users on this site (Ede and Lunsford)?

In short, what identities are being constructed and claimed by this description? By including ethnicities (“Chinese-Canadian or Korean-American”), this blogring assumes a shared identity among different ethnic Asian groups and I see this “shared” experience indicated in the rest of the sentence: “many of us are still struggling to form our own identity between East and West.” Placing ethnic identities between these two cultural imaginaries suggests an important intersection between ethnicity and race, where ethnic differences are acknowledged but the racial experiences of struggling between “East and West” remains the organizing logic. Finally, the description ends with a rally call coalescing around “fellow yellow,” indicating that members believe in a common “Asian” identity they can explore along with others through this blogring.

While “Asian Diaspora” aims to explore identity through shared storytelling, it also represents itself by drawing on familiar images of Asian Americans as unformed, struggling, and caught in-between two cultures. This blogring, then, may be working as a “hyphenated title” unto itself, by gesturing to users who struggle not only with their own identity, but place themselves between the tensions of static and known representations and a shifting, formative identity. The call and possibilities of exploring and creating new identities, then, depend on users *identifying with* previous, limiting ones. Framed in this light, “Asian Diaspora’s” description can be seen to function in ambiguously communal and public ways.

On one hand, this blogring offers a place for users to share their stories with others who also identify with this description and with each other. As Joseph Harris

notes in “The Idea of Community in the Study of Writing,” “[o]ne does not need consensus to have community. Matters of accident, necessity, and convenience hold groups together as well” (20). Identification with a community, based on the shared work of identity production, can also produce community. Read this way, “Asian Diaspora” can be comprehended as a signpost that signals to Asian (North) Americans passing along on the digital road, the potential of a community, given the visitor’s identification with “Asian Diaspora”’s description. On the other hand, this description can be read as a public text as theorized by Warner and his third condition on publics: “The address of public speech is both personal and impersonal.” Warner goes on to explain,

> With public speech [...] we might recognize ourselves as addressees, but it is equally important that we remember that the speech was addressed to indefinite others; that in singling us out, it does so not on the basis of our concrete identity, but by virtue of our participation in the discourse alone, and therefore in common with strangers. (58)

Warner recognizes that public addresses hinge on the public knowing they are being addressed. For “Asian Diaspora,” this means that users who feel compelled to join this blogring do so because, to some significant degree, “Asian Diaspora” resonates with their own sense of self and positionality in the world; in other words, their “being” is addressed. In fact, Warner states, “strangers can be treated as already belonging to the world” (56). Public texts, then, orientate themselves to this relationship of the public as constituted by a socio-historical context; it is itself a consequence of history, and calls upon its own context to address the public. Yet, as Warner notes, identifying with a text does not alone make the text public. A passerby can read this “text” and believe that it speaks to her, but ultimately she may decide not to cross over and into community lines. Would this be considered participation, and hence, can this person be considered as part

of the public? According to Warner, “Merely paying attention can be enough to make you a member” of the public (53). Attention, then, may count as participation, particularly when Warner states that a public addresses people “not on the basis of our concrete identity, but by virtue of our participation.” But the terms “attention” and “participation” are much more complex than Warner lets on; to “attend” to a public text also requires a person’s orientation toward the text as much as the text may be orientated toward the person and public, because to identify with a text already dictates paying attention, of attending to the text.

We can see this potential tension between one’s orientation toward and attending to a text in examining participants’ motivation for joining the blogring. For the survey, I posited a series of questions about “Asian Diaspora.” I wanted to know why participants selected this blogring and how they see themselves or others respond to the description offered above. About half of the participants who took the survey (10 out of 19) responded to the “Asian Diaspora” questions, and 7 out of these 10 participants expressed that they joined because they can identify with the description or they wanted to reach out and/or relate to people with similar experiences. For example, Alex writes, “The description fit[s] me, being a Chinese American that have [sic] struggled with identity issues in the past.” Angeline simply states, “I could identify with it.” Some participants, like Jeffrey and Sonlay express that they joined “Asian Diaspora” to “Meet some other asian americans” and “Just to talk and befriend the Asian community. It was a nice way to find people with similar experiences,” respectively. Overall, these participants represent many of the users who affiliate themselves with “Asian Diaspora,” and by examining their responses in both surveys and interviews, we can see that data suggest

that users' motivations for joining both "Asian Diaspora" and even Xanga are due to their lack of a place and space where they can explore their own identity in relation to others with similar experiences as Asian Americans. Therefore, to speak of participants' motivation entails an examination at the intersections of participants as individuals and as part of a broader Asian-American context; they did not select this blogring because of chance, but due to a collective need and desire to find and share their stories with each other and to make sense of what it means to be Asian American. And while Asian Americans have been successful in creating social and political collectives in the past, emerging Internet technology, social networking technology in particular, is helping them meet and engage much easier than other geographically limiting models of assembly.[24]

To return to a quotation above, Angeline's statement—"I could identify with it"—seems like a rather straightforward response to "What were your reasons for joining ['Asian Diaspora']?" Yet, this simple sentence belies the complexity behind Angeline's ability to make such an assertion. Angeline's identification, as many of the participants and users share, with "Asian Diaspora" is not only couched in her own identity inquiries and struggles, but more so, Angeline and participants explicitly connect their sense of self to a larger Asian-American collective experience, and they do so through writing in various parts of their writing ecology. These movements between the self and community, the individual and public (and various combinations of these binaries)

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[24] I go on to examine the nature of this collective in chapter five, in which I argue that SNSs allow users a way to poach popular media and, and in turn, to use such materials in participants' own public writings. SNSs, then, can generally be perceived as a site and technology that affords Asian Americans the ability to assert their existence, specifically, in the cultural arena, which is something less seen and explored. More typically, Asian Americans have been studied through a literary lens that tends to look to coalitions around social and political movements. In other words, how Asian Americans signify and represent themselves in and against popular culture is less determined in our field (see Manalansan IV; Mao and Young).

suggest that users, indeed, conceive of their own identities and the places and spaces in which these identities "fit" as multiple and overlapping. For instance, when I asked Geoff, an ethnically "Chinese-American," 26 year-old male participant, to respond to the description of "Asian Diaspora, he goes on to state,

> I'm not sure if any of the members actively strive towards achieving the purpose for which the blogring was made, but rather we post entries about what interests us and if others find what we have to say interesting, then that's good – we realize we're not alone in thinking a certain way. For many of us Asians in North-America, we don't really fit into the Caucasian identity, and personally, I don't think we should. Growing up in a predominantly white community, I always wanted to be like them because then I would "fit in". Now that I'm many years older (and hopefully wiser), I've come to realize that Asian-Americans (I use that term for pan-Americas, not specifically for the United States) should have their own identity. Whether we like it or not, we're not Caucasian, and we should be proud of that fact and embrace it, not shun it like some would have us do. So in this blogring, I see more a reflection of myself than I ever did "in real life." (survey)

Geoff's reflection is complex, yet representative of the members of "Asian Diaspora"; it features overlapping characteristics of public and community, as well as personal and collective understandings of his own and others' racialized identities. In his first sentence, Geoff demonstrates his understanding of the tenuous goal in the description by pushing against "Asian Diaspora" through the statement: "we post entries about what interests us," rather than what "Asian Diaspora" issues as its purpose. While Geoff uses "Asian Diaspora" as an access point to an Asian-American community (he writes, "I was looking for a blogring that would allow me to reach out and associate with others"), he challenges how the description limits his identity and his writing by admitting that he and others exceed the blogring's intentions to write from only a struggling and formative position. This position is clearly important, but as Geoff points out later in his passage, it is not the only one he adheres to as his identity on Xanga, and this is reflected in my

analysis of his blog, showing a more comprehensive person who writes sometimes from an overtly racialized place, but also includes his everyday musings on work, food, and photography, to name a few topics. Such repositioning in his response reflects how he moves along the community and public spectrum, and indicates that he may be balancing and overlapping different community and public intentions when it comes to his writing or his relationship to other texts on this site.

In particular, I find the rest of Geoff's first sentence striking because Geoff is able to merge notions of public and community when he writes, "...we post entries about what interests us and if others find what we have to say interesting, then that's good – we realize we're not alone in thinking a certain way." In this part of the passage, Geoff understands that "Asian Diaspora," as a technology, has the potential to expose his writing to an unknown public, who may or may not be Asian American, but this identity is not a condition for joining. In fact, anyone can join as long as one has an account, and some participants reminded me of this when I interviewed them (Alex, Chris, Coolmonkey, and Sonlay). As common knowledge, users know that "Asian Diaspora" affords connections between interested Asian Americans, but other users of different backgrounds can and sometimes do read their blogs; "Asian Diaspora" is significant, but just one of the many channels of circulation for Xanga's blogs. In addition, Geoff does not seem initially concerned with writing in order to "interest" a specific group of people; by virtue of interest, Geoff conceives of his writing more like public texts when he states, "if others find what we have to say interesting, then that's good."

In other words, Geoff admits that he writes not with a particular audience in mind, but to a public that may or may not be interested in his blogs. Yet when such interest is

garnered or recognized, this signals to Geoff that, "we're not alone in thinking a certain way." Here, participation is an interesting phenomenon, because it exceeds what Warner may consider participation by mere attention. The interest that Geoff perceives transforms into a communal experience upon its recognition as interest: "we're not alone." For Geoff, interest *is* participation (otherwise how would he know anyone is interested?), and *is* affirmation that there is commonality among other users based on an Asian-American identity. That is, in order for Geoff to know that his writing "interests" others, he must be able to see this interest manifested in technological indications such as comments, view counts, or footprints[25] on his blogs and profile. But for Geoff, such interests can show him not only a strange public, but reveal users who share in his way of thinking and who are also identifying with "Asian Diaspora."

Given such data, I re-interpret Warner's public texts as constructions of identity in which identity is quintessentially slippery; while people can identify with public addresses as a public, there is also a simultaneous mis-identification happening. That is, more solid or static identity representations work against the public nature of a text because it narrows the addressee down to a definable and knowable mass. In doing so, a text that claims a more static representation of identity may be working to address a known collective or audience, rather than a more public imaginary in which an element of the unknown, a sense of being among strangers identifies it as public. Such room for misinterpretation and ambiguity accounts for how difference and "strangeness" can

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[25] Footprints is a function that any user can use to see who has visited their site. A user can also choose to turn this function on for herself, but this will exclude her from sites that require this information. This function does not necessarily dissuade users from being lurkers or anonymous because more motivated users can create a pseudo-profile so that they can be "tracked," but remain semi-anonymous through a different identity.

inhabit the space carved out by public texts. Hence, the ambiguous identity representations of "Asian Diaspora" make it hard to pin down how this blogring functions as a public and as a site of community. But in examining this site from participants' perspectives, they demonstrate that community and public can exist as simultaneous imaginaries and writing environments, which challenges the idea that we have to look at texts as one or the other.

Geoff and other participants understand that anyone (in the public) has the potential to read their writing (if they choose to publish without privacy settings), yet it is only in the technologically affirmative signs of people reading about, commenting on, and witnessing one's writing that a user can "see" and experience the commonality that is constitutive of this Asian-American community, or any other digital community for that matter. If I extend my analysis of Geoff, other Asian Americans may be experiencing similar diasporic situations, but since the term "diaspora" suggests geographical remoteness, how do diasporic Asian Americans come to know that they share similar experiences without having to look to other arenas of representations or beyond their immediate, local community? One may identify it through literature or skewed representations on television, if this topic does get any airtime, but otherwise, it is difficult to recognize and maintain a collective that is not bounded by proximity prior to the Internet. And while social networking technologies may be in the market to provide socialization (of course, at the cost of our attention to advertisers), it may be affording Asian Americans a way to simultaneously interact with a community and a public (as part of a public) that has been historically fraught and at times actively denied to them.

The rest of Geoff's reflection attends to this diasporic sense of identity. In doing so Geoff addresses his own identity as both an individual and collective experience that, in addition, is contrasted against a "Caucasian" one. In fact, he singles himself out as "[g]rowing up in a predominately white community" and wanting to "fit in." But in the next sentence, Geoff makes Asian American an object of analysis, thus, separating himself from this blogring when he states, "I've come to realize that Asian-Americans [...] should have *their own* identity" (my emphasis). Geoff moves from locating himself among a "white" community, where fitting in means wanting "to be like them" (which I take to mean as wanting to be white), to conceiving of an Asian-American identity as detached, or not quite attainable. Other participants also express similar feelings and beliefs of not fitting in, but more so, not knowing how to identify themselves as Asian American, as indicated by Geoff's "should have"; that is, Asian Americans "should have" an identity, but this realization remains dubious. For instance, Aaron writes in response to the question on "Asian Diaspora": "I think it's true, at home we are taught one way by our parents and relatives but outside and the main stream media show us something different…I feel like there is tension in between these two worlds we asian often live in, at times almost contradictory to how we [are] supposed to identify ourselves" (survey).

Aaron's depiction between his home life (in his words, "traditional Asian") and the broader American culture represents a more typical "between-worlds" trope. But instead of using this trope to suggest the linguistic differences between home and school settings, a model that remains problematic (Hattori and Ching), I read this through a community-public lens that frames participants' understanding of their own identities as simultaneously constituted in and problematized by these two arenas. Participants view

the “Asian” part of Asian American within the parameters of the more private spheres of the home and local community, whereas “American” comes to signify the “outside,” the “mainstream media,” or a more public space in which Asian Americans have been historically denied membership and representation. That is, the racialized parts of an Asian-American identity fall along community and public lines because of how race has been treated and understood as an individual cultural experience. “American,” then, comes to signify a publicly sanctioned (white) image that is represented *to* participants through the mediation of public (or rather, popular) media and arenas. For Asian-American participants in this study, to transgress previous communities and publics traditionally defined by whiteness means recreating and re-imagining these spaces and places where they do belong and where multiple and/or contesting identities and racial experiences are *the typical* stories being told.

Conclusion

In contrast to much of the work done on race and technology focusing on issues of access and voice, or the need to destabilize identities (Banks, Grabill, and Redd), Xanga, as a unique writing ecology, allows writers to explore racial identities that are neither fixed nor completely fluid, but function in a dialectical relationship. As these identities are created through the tension between fixed and unstable constructions, they are also informed by their movement through and within particular audiences and orientations of their writing ecologies. Such movement to articulate a “self” is, in fact, propelled by *a social differential or social kinetics* afforded by the interplay between various manifestations of community and public imaginaries on Xanga. By using the term social kinetics, I aim to describe formations of identity as a particular dynamic or

movement contingent upon writers' constructions of a community and public imaginary and the writing ecology and related identity positions they inhabit. That is, if these imaginaries—a descriptor that includes notions of both audience and orientations—are ever-changing for writers, then so too are writers' sense and articulation of selves. This chapter examines what happens when participants opt to maintain the complexity and tension of community-public imaginaries as they relationally create static and stable identity formations around Asian American that itself is subject to change.

Instead of rejecting one imaginary for the other and maintaining stability in either site, participants accommodate the overlapping and contending nature of community and public imaginaries by repositioning themselves within a continuously changing ecology that, in turn, is also informed and reimagined by the writers' own purposes. In short, desires to belong in various ecological sites require writers to engage in a cyclic process of stabilizing and dismantling their own identities in order to move into and through these different spaces that are regulated by writer-audience conventions and ideologies. To be heard, for instance, in a community domain entails writers to construct a self that is *recognizable* to that community. But, public recognition may take on different shades of identity production because being heard by the public requires a "voice" and identity that may not align with a community sensibility, and vice versa. This differential, emerging from an interplay between or desire for both, is what prevents writers from maintaining a fixed identity, but, rather, propels them through various manifestations of racialized identity formations. I explore and develop this in subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER 4

THE SOCIAL KINETICS OF APPROXIMATING AND STABILIZING ASIAN-AMERICAN IDENTITIES

In mapping out movements (and, hence, transformations) of race in my data, three major instantiations of identity appear: Approximations and Stabilizations of Identity; Representing Community and Challenging "Public" Representations; and Re-Producing Identities from a Different Center. This chapter is concerned with the first and specifically how writers create a stable identity from which they can speak and be heard. Such stability can be seen in participants' production of identity that often emerges from participants' writing of intercultural tensions; such narrations feature as a prominent trope in this research because they allow participants opportunities for addressing experiences of alienation from their own ethnic community and public arenas. As participants in this chapter demonstrate, the tension between an ethnic and American identity offline significantly influences their identity formations online. Furthermore, identity claims function as sites of dialogue that provide writers a place to "meet," forge, and affirm community relationships based on similar experiences with others, while inviting both community and public members to discuss race on the writer's own terms. That is, a stable self that emerges from discursive claims provides writers a platform to work from and push against, and suggests that *the ways* in which participants are heard and acknowledged are just as important as being heard in the first place.

Participants want to be recognized by members of their community and broader public, but on their own terms. This confluence of motivations to be heard by various manifestations of these imaginaries in particular ways, then, results in identity

constructions that can be recognizable enough to a community and public in their stability (and at times stereotyped representations). Yet these constructions also exceed and challenge such recognitions by audiences due to writers' insistence of representing their own version of Asian American. Writing acts that function to stabilize and assert Asian-American identities became clear to me in surveys and interviews when participants reflected on why writing on Xanga is important to them. For instance, Chris notes that he feels "free" to be himself on Xanga (Skype Interview 12/17/2010). Others echo Chris's opinion when they express that Xanga is an "outlet" for them (AJ, MariaBoscardin, Matt, Alex, Coolmonkey, utoppia). In the survey, I asked participants, "How would you characterize or describe Xanga to a friend (who has not been exposed to Xanga)?" Chris writes, "A community where you can be yourself and you will find people who will love you for it. A chance to escape the mask you cover on your face to get through every day in real life. A place to be free" (my emphasis). Many of the interviewed participants—seven—felt this way about Xanga, but it was in revisiting Chris's particular passage that the following questions emerged: "Free from what?" or, similarly, "An outlet for/from what?" By placing this passage in relation to Chris's blogs, and indeed, by placing many of the participants' surveys and interviews in relation to their own blogs, participants indicate that they treat Xanga not so much as an escape from "real life" but one that allows them to be "free" to be what they want to be in relation to what they believe they cannot be in other arenas of their offline experience. Participants, in other words, significantly write about being marginalized by public arenas while simultaneously alienated from their own home/community enclaves. I read Chris's ability to "be free" on Xanga as a freedom from what he perceives as limitations

from his “real life,” where he sees himself being someone he is not “to get through every day”—strong words emphasizing his estrangement from his “real life” sites. Given that Xanga allows writers to forge their own relationships, community places, and public spaces, it makes sense that Chris and others gravitate to Xanga because they construct identities that are significantly accepted rather than rejected. Chris confirms this reading in our interview: “on Xanga, I get to release everything about how I feel or what I don’t like about certain aspects of my life so far, and… I find a balance between accepting my culture and who I am, who I grew up with, and at the same time wanting to become someone else I want to be.”

Chris’ passage underscores the cultural tensions and challenges that he experiences at home and in broader public arenas, experiences that many of the participants share. This theme of intercultural tensions and challenges is addressed by all interviewed participants (11). Twenty-six out of forty users in aggregate data addressed this theme at some point in their archived blogs, addressed it multiple times, and responded to the theme as comments. In addition, my aggregate data show this trope directly taken up by participants’ blogs a total of 69 times over the span of one year (by direct, I mean that participants made this the main subject of their writing). utoppia, another participant, describes this activity around intercultural themes and what Xanga means to many of the participants in relation to their offline experiences:

> utoppia: I think Asians have a harder time trying to be accepted without looking or being call a nerd or a dork
> Me: Do you think that Xanga allows them a space to be more themselves?
> utoppia: it's stereotypes that we grew up with that’s affected us in that sense. On one hand, we can’t be expressive because for the asians who grew up in my era, we had Tiger moms and strict upbringings

> utoppia: so yes, xanga definitely allowed them to express themselves and venture out to say what's on their mind.
> (Instant Messaging Interview 2/24/2011)

This passage illustrates utoppia accepting the stereotype of “Tiger Moms” and the resulting “Tiger Cubs” as overachieving and asocial. In addition, she sees these stereotypes, tied to the racialized body, as the reason why some “Asians” are not accepted. The implication here is that many Asian and Asian-American participants engage with Xanga because they are not able to express themselves elsewhere because of how their bodies signify “nerdy” or “dorky.” Mark, a 24-year-old, male, dental student, who sees himself as ethnically “Japanese” and racially “Asian,” underscores this experience of being read as “nerdy”: “I guess one of my motivations to continue writing is that I like interacting with these people because it makes me feel more important than I am in real life, where I’m just another book nerd” (survey). Both utoppia’s observation of Xangans and Mark’s reflection support Chris’ claim that Xanga allows him “to become someone else [he] want[s] to be.” Examining this desire against participants’ experiences of being racialized as Asian and therefore “nerdy,” shows that Xanga provides Asian-American writers a place to belong because their visual and cultural differences are not signs of being different or outside the norm. Rather, differences emerging from such intersections and tensions of race and culture are exactly what constitute the nature of their membership and belonging in their community and which, in turn, allow them to feel supported in their public voices.

The rest of this chapter examines three participants—Nick, Chris, and Angeline—who approximate, claim, and reconfigure particular identities as part of an Asian-American experience. In doing so, these participants revise their previous relationships

to their community and public imaginaries by rewriting themselves as members to these sites. I start with Nick because he represents writers who are still in the process of seeking an accepted identity within his community imaginary. While Nick indicates the significance of destabilizing static identity positions through processes of approximation, Chris shows how the stabilization of identity within a community imaginary allows him to normalize his identity for the public. For Chris, the community can be seen to help him not only stabilize an identity, but it also frames his identity claims as accepted and celebrated for potential community members gazing in from the public position—his claims and how they are received by the community come to define the community and underscore the effect that micro formations of identity can have on macro formations of race. I round out this chapter with Angeline who presents the most complex identity constructions out of these three participants. She illustrates how claiming and stabilizing something potentially radical, like a pan-sexual, Asian-American identity is done through the concurrent establishment of static identities recognizable by readers from both the community and public. By including stereotypical but recognizable identities in her writing, Angeline provides commenters known avenues of access into her blogs while challenging them with alternative views on sexuality, gender, and race.

I selected Nick, Chris, and Angeline for this chapter because they best capture various moments in the process of approximating, claiming, and stabilizing identities among the set of interviewed participants. In addition, I believe that their various approaches and uses of community and public imaginaries provide a good sample reflecting the heterogeneous experiences and personal histories writers bring to Xanga. Even with such heterogeneity among these participants, community and public

imaginaries significantly function in the majority of participants' writing processes and racial identity formations. Understanding how these imaginaries function for specific writers and contexts, then, allows us to better comprehend how race forms at the intersection of personal and collective experiences, writing, and new technologies.

Nick: "I'm not Korean enough. I'm not American enough": Approximating Asian-American and Community Constructions

By examining moments where participants attempt to stabilize an identity for the community and public, I find that participants, in addition to writing to these imaginaries, also engage with community and public in different ways and to various degrees given their personal, offline histories to these imaginaries. The community component, for instance, may play a more important role at different identity/identification processes for writers. In fact, I discovered that the community imaginary is more significant than the public imaginary for writers starting on Xanga and/or for writers who are perceived as still searching for a more stable identity. New members to this site, and to most social network sites, cannot immediately claim to be part of an existing community. Unless users have had previous offline relationships with other users (Facebook would be an example of extending offline relationship onto an online context), new members are often times subject to creating themselves for other members and, indeed, one can say that new members are partially subject to established members' communal conventions (Baym). While this subjection of self is not a one-way street—new members also have agency to inform community beliefs and practices—I want to emphasize that the process of making oneself visible and therefore known on Xanga is also dependent on whether other members are willing to "see" and recognize (through comments and other online cues) a new member as part of the community. Hence, such community "seeing" works to

discipline writers seeking membership into the community because it requires that new members make themselves visible to the community's line of sight.

In investigating these particular moments where writers are attempting to create a textual self for others, I forward that some writers appear to be *approximating* an identity through back-and-forth, discursive movements with community members. This approximating of identity can be seen in writing where community commentary functions to instruct and discipline writers' continuous construction of self. For example, Sonlay admits, "I used to be popular and would only write things that people felt entertaining./ so it would influence me on how my next post would be" (Instant Messaging Interview 2/28/2011). Although Sonlay is reflecting on his previous popular status, his quote also suggests that remaining popular depends on writing "things that people felt entertaining" and that such responses from people influenced him, as a writer, in addition to how he would create his next post. Sonlay's reaction to visitors' responses illustrates the relationship among writers and readers and how readers on Xanga can significantly inform writers' construction of self and their writing production. Although Sonlay offers valuable insights into his process of identity formation on Xanga, he also admits he has been on Xanga for a long time and does not feel that responses affect him as much anymore (Instant Messaging Interview 2/28/2011). Instead, I turn to Nick and his writing because Nick appears to be in the process of seeking a sense of self that Sonlay seems to have already achieved. Among the interviewed participants, Nick best represents users who are in the process of approximating their Asian-American identities in relation to an Asian-American community.

Nick's intersecting identities prove challenging to his attempts to belong in his community, and such difficulty highlights how his approximating processes function to "register" a racial identity among his community imaginary. Conversely, his approximating identity formations also challenge the community to broaden their understanding of the Asian-American experience. In addition, Nick writes from *static* identity positions more than most of the participants in this study. Static identities tend to be identity positions that writers may be unaware of inhabiting and can be described as (sometimes invisible) ideological subject positions informing writers and their online productions (e.g. woman, heterosexual, and American). It may be difficult for users to recognize static identities in their own writing, particularly when this position provides some sort of privilege or power. For instance, someone who promotes color-blind rhetoric may write from an identity position that treats racism as a visual issue ("I don't see race"). This person is most likely unaware that being color-blind is a racist position attempting to deny racism by denying the existence of race.

In contrast, *stable* identities are intentionally constructed *rhetorical* positions that involve the writer's ethos and credibility. These identities, demonstrated by Chris and Angeline, are self-reflexive in that they call attention to themselves as identities. For example, when writers claim "I am Asian American" (Chris), they are calling attention to Asian American as an identity that argues for a particular definition or understanding of Asian-American. The stability of these identities allows users to achieve writing goals, but are in themselves subject to transformations according the needs of the writer and in relation to the writer's own intersections of identities—"I identify more with my Black identity than my Filipina one" (Raquel)—other users' identities, and the writer's

relationship with (past and present) community-public imaginaries: the evident claiming of identity is part of the writing.[26] The awareness of an identity as a stable construction as opposed to an invisible static construction affords users a means to critically and intentionally change and revise the stable identity because it is a projected writing object—it is external to them in ways that a static identity is not, and still invisible and internalized.

Analyzing Nick's data shows racial identities in constant relational negotiations with other community members at a micro level, and such examinations reveal that only a biological model (phenotype; how one looks) or cultural model (learned behaviors and belief systems) do not adequately explain racial formations and identities.[27] Rather, race is continuously recreated in the movement/tension between self and community, self and public, and the varied permutations among these imaginaries. Nick is a 24-year-old male college student who self-identifies as ethnically "Korean" and racially "Asian." Like many of the participants in this study, Nick talks about searching for an Asian-American identity. But Nick provides a distinctive experience and perspective in contrast to other participants because he was adopted by white parents from South Korea when he was an infant. For Nick, growing up in a predominately white area without an ethnic enclave poses challenges to belong in ways other (non-adopted) participants do not always share.

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[26] I want to emphasize that the progression from static to stable identities is not always a linear process. In fact, I have found participants who have been on Xanga for years and remain working from static positions of identity. Static and stable identities are always in flux and in some instances these positions depend on each other as co-constructing forces—as suggested by the latter section on Angeline. For more scholarship on identity formation, particularly static identities, please see Jonathan Alexander, 2002; Barclay Barrios, 2004; and Laura Sullivan, 1999.

[27] For more substantial explorations on biological and cultural models of race, see Keith Gilyard, and Michael Omi and Howard Winant.

In responding to survey questions, Nick describes his childhood as oppositions between his American and ethnic one:

> On my part, I desperately wanted to be a typical American. I was adopted by white parents and attended a private school where I was the only minority in my class of ~30 (aside from a girl who was ¼ Chinese). Hence I made every effort to abandon my heritage, never bothering and even resisting learning my Korean culture. I didn't want to be more Asian than I already was for fear of further isolating myself and being exposed to more ridicule.

This passage highlights Nick's racialized experienced growing up and his attempt to be less Asian in order to be more American, which, also means more "white" in Nick's case (Frankenberg). Nick does not have the bifurcated experiences that other participants have in terms of a disciplining ethnic enclave (see chapter three), but Nick still encountered much of the racism attributed to his Asian body. In our interview, he notes how he has been made to feel foreign when students at his military school would tell him to "go back to the rice patties" (Skype Interview 12/19/2010). While Nick experienced being "picked on a lot" throughout his school years, he did not have an ethnic community that might have provided him a degree of consolation through shared difference and racialized mocking (Lee 103). Instead, his rejections in these broader arenas, such as grade and military school, illustrates that he was made to feel his Asian-ness even while he admits that he wanted to culturally align with whiteness so as to "fit in" with others. Yet, Nick attempts to resolve his racial tensions by seeking ethnic knowledge to "align" with what he perceives as his ethnic roots. Using ethnicity to address race, or vice versa, tends to happen often in this community, suggesting that race and ethnicity are complex, intersecting concepts and experiences for members.

Nick's childhood is representative of many Korean adoptees interviewed in works theorizing Korean adoption experiences (Dorow; Eleana J. Kim; Tae-Sun Kim). In Tae-Sun Kim's ethnographic study of 40 Korean adult adoptees and their negotiation of racial and ethnic identities, the author states, "the vast majority of my informants were ashamed of being Asian American or self-conscious about their physical differences, principally because of the negative attention it attracted from people they were trying to be accepted by and for all intensive purposes [sic], were forced to live, interact, and be accepted amongst (22). Kim goes on to theorize that "[e]xperiences of racialized misconceptions and stereotypes accumulated over time, and collectively influenced how [the author's] informants navigated their daily lives and plans for their future" (94). Through Xanga, I see Nick negotiating such racial injuries in order to make sense of who he is as an emerging Asian American. By examining Nick's writing, I extend on Kim's work by showing how Nick addresses and uses his imagined community in order to approximate his own identity within a pan-Asian-American collective on Xanga.

By looking at the process in which Nick struggles to find himself, I can see the community imaginary functioning differently for Nick in comparison to Chris or Angeline; he does not feel estranged from the public the same way. As an adoptee, Nick imagines himself as part of the nation-state. Yet through others, he is made aware of how his body signifies to the public a racio-cultural experience to which he had little access. Nick's material body, in effect, signifies an excess of race for him and his (white) community. Growing up, Nick would try to counter such excessive readings of his body as "Asian" by actively "minimalizing [his] ethnicity" through cultural means. Because Nick could not change his body, he distanced himself from any cultural associations that

would be tied to his body as *acting* Asian. He refused to do Karate, as his parents encouraged, and when anyone tried to bring up the topic of Asian to Nick he would quickly change the subject (Skype Interview 12/19/2010). Therefore, Nick learns that growing up in a culturally "white" area (according to him) and being cut off from his ethnic origins or associations does not mean that he is white or will be treated as white. Instead, Nick writes in his survey, "Eventually I came to accept who I am; an Asian American. Now I not only identify to some degree with other Asians, but am attempting to learn more about my heritage and trying to 'Asianify' myself."

Nick's adoption experiences, then, influence him to search for an Asian-American identity online because of the perceived lack he feels (or is made to feel by others). He starts by "trying to learn Korean, just some small stuff, and then being on Xanga." Through Xanga, Nick meets other Asians and Asian Americans and he notes that such exposure helps him learn what it means to be Asian: "…when I meet these other Asians, that helped me a lot, because ahh… they could discuss their ah… their history and how they were brought up, and I could kind of get ahh… some information from them" (Skype Interview 12/19/2010). Being Asian, to Nick, is partly a matter of information transference and contrasts with a biological model in which one is Asian because one is born as such. Yet Nick tends to contradict this concept when he speaks (in our interview) of himself as being Asian, and something that he cannot "ignore" or "bleach [his] skin" to erase. For Nick, belonging in this particular community becomes a complex negotiation of race on various levels; "learning" Asian American seems to address his issues stemming from his body and how it signals race through visual cues/reactions—because he cannot erase his raced body, he mitigates it through culture. As Nick reflects, this

addition of culture is not just a matter of learning how to be Asian American. Instead, Nick's attempts to belong in an Asian-American community becomes a fraught process when community members challenge Nick's writing and responses that are shaped by his ideological position as white and public.

In his blog, "Why Do All Muslims Overreact?" Nick writes from a static position of whiteness to an audience of community members. Ensuing members' responses instruct him on how to respond on Xanga and thereby discipline him on how to "be" an Asian American. To summarize, Nick responded to another blogger's post that I speculate to be about women and the Muslim culture (I believe this blog is on private since I cannot access it). Nick's blog, then, recounts how this "original" blogger describes Nick as "insensitive" and inappropriately "sarcastic" in responding to her post. The following is a selection from Nick's blog:

> Of course I wasn't trying to be insensitive [in referring to his comment on the original blogger's post], and stated "oh i'm quite sensitive to this. this and many other travesties that have been occurring to women and Christians over there for years. and yet there seems to be no end to what Muslims will do in the name of Allah."
> Only to get [from the blogger], "And yet you apparently make sarcastic comments about it on my page. Well I am sensitive to it as well, so please don't mock the issue or my entry. Thank you." […]
> I don't understand Muslims. They claim to be peaceful ect. etc. but at the slightest provocation get all defensive and start making accusations or attacks. Take for example this cartoon. [Nick includes the controversial Danish cartoon of Mohammed (2005) and goes on to expand on this and how Muslims ought to be responsible for their own social issues.]
> (Blog 11/21/2010)

Nick's blogging can be seen as a reaction to being called "insensitive" to a rather sensitive cultural issue and his attempt in saying so causes more misunderstanding when his response gets read as sarcastic by the original blogger. This misreading from the original blogger appears to bother Nick enough so that he decides to write his own blog

recounting this exchange for other members in his own community.[28] While this blog did not receive many comments and only four people (community members) commented, it did receive 55 total views. Most of the comments from the community aimed at helping Nick see how he was generalizing a whole population and how his writing could be negatively interpreted by readers. While one commenter directly attempted to support Nick by saying that she didn't read his comment as "anything sarcastic or mocking," this support included advice on not generalizing and needing to know one's audience (Commenter Three).

In examining ensuing exchanges between Nick and Commenter One, Nick can be seen as responding from a position of whiteness in which his view of Muslim people takes on generalizing and nationalistic overtones. Commenter One quotes Nick and asks for clarification: "'After suggesting that Islam is a violent religion, what happens? Oh that's right, they go and bomb convents, set fire to embassies and riot. I'm sorry, you're not helping your cause.' [passage from Nick after the cartoon] Nick, can you re-state this? I may be reading this wrong because it makes no sense to me right now." Commenter One's request for clarification gives Nick the benefit of the doubt and allows him to explain his beliefs more thoroughly. Nick responds to Commenter One: "it seems Muslims (generalizing) are their own worst enemies at times, when they proclaim one thing and then act in a completely different manner; you can't victimize yourself when you are assaulting others." Although Nick admits that he is generalizing all Muslim people, as evidenced by his inclusion of "generalizing" in parentheses, he fails to see how Commenter One's and other, similar responses attempt to show Nick it is the actual

[28] I am not sure if the original blogger that Nick references is part of the Asian-American community I examine for this study. I did not think to ask him this during our interview.

generalizing of people that is the issue. For example, Commenter One goes on to argue after Nick's response, "Your title is a generalization, Nick." Another commenter writes, "If they were pissed at you for being insensitive, then I can see where that came from, especially if you're going to generalize an entire group of people like so" (Commenter Two).

Nick's inability to see how his is generalization of a whole population through the actions of a few can be hurtful and offensive to the original blogger and anyone who identifies as Muslim on this site indicates how Nick's own writing is informed by whiteness. This is not to imply that only white people generalize; anyone can take on and inhabit a white, Western position that functions to other non-Western people—indeed, Nick is not visibly white but is informed by such perspectives. Timothy Barnett distinguishes between white as a race and whiteness as a particular cultural position: "Whiteness is not tied essentially to skin color, but is nonetheless related in complex and powerful ways to the perceived phenomenon of race in our culture" (10). Whiteness, then, can be understood as an ideological position shaping Nick's blog and subsequent responses to readers' comments. Consequently, whiteness prevents him from addressing this issue of generalizing but motivates him to justify it ("It is a generalization, which is part of the point"). In generalizing, Nick marks Muslim people as violent, hypocritical, different and, hence, "other" while normalizing his own position as opposite, with the further implication that his perspective is the logical and right one (Said). Generalizing is indeed the point, but Nick does not understand how representing the few as the whole is similar to his own experiences where racist and generalizing slurs were leveled at him by fellow schoolmates (e.g "Go back to the rice paddies"). That Nick cannot see himself in

this position speaks to the invisibility of his static, ideological position of power from which he writes. Kim further underscores this experience with many Korean adoptees in stating that "Whiteness was associated with feeling normal, thus being unmarked by symbols of difference and reminders of racial vulnerability" (117). It may be no surprise that Nick internalized this position as an adoptee, "[e]specially for [adoptees] who were too young to remember their lives in Korea, the Whiteness of their adoptive communities represented the normal life by which they had to conform" (117).

Bringing in this normalized position to his writing further suggests that Nick is also including a public position that contrasts with the more intentional approaches in addressing and/or constructing publics by other participants. As someone who grew up with white parents and in a predominately white area, Nick was (problematically) treated as part of a public imaginary (as understood to be territorialized by white bodies) in ways that other participants did not experience. That Nick is exercising his position of whiteness is made clearer when such perspectives are placed in tension with the community. In a follow-up response to her original comment, Commenter One writes, "I am not certain what it is with other Muslims, since I don't speak for all, but I feel *we're just so used to having hate targeted towards us that we've become 'sensitive' and perhaps, 'wary' of any off-beat comments and we just want to make sure* that there are no misunderstanding/ misapprehensions there" (my emphasis). Commenter One's use of "we" in this response creates an interesting rhetorical move that can be read in multiple ways. On one hand, Commenter One's use of "we" can be read as a disclosure that she, too, is Muslim. By aligning her identity with the same Muslim people Nick reproaches,

Commenter One may be cautioning Nick that this community is also constituted by people who are Muslim, while advising him that such sensitivity is not without cause.

Commenter One's identification with the Muslim people and experience, perhaps, is meant to help Nick understand that his generalization can affect members within his own community, while helping him approximate an identity more acceptable to the community. That is, Commenter One can be seen as instructing Nick on what is appropriate engagement and identity construction by portraying the community as the same people he is condemning. Read in this way, Commenter One may be trying to humanize the Muslim people to Nick through her own textual/visual body—her photo icon that shows up next to each comment, in addition to her profile name, may not signify "Muslim" to Nick or others in Nick's position. Thus, Commenter One's alignment with the Muslim religion and people may be working to deconstruct, through textual and visual means, such stereotypes for Nick and other visitors potentially reading this exchange.

Alternatively, Commenter One can be read as using "we" not necessarily in coalition with the Muslim people, but as representative of the Asian-American community from which she writes. Muslim and Asian American are not exclusive identity categories, though, and it is possible that Commenter One is writing from both identity positions. Her response, "we're just so used to having hate targeted towards us," can be seen as instructing Nick on the Asian-American experience as empathetic to, if not inclusive of Muslim people, and signals to him that this community is founded on and even marked by shared histories of harmful generalization and marginalization (e.g. all Muslims are reactionary and violent and are, therefore, incapable of self-governance).

This further indicates to Nick that if he wants to be part of the "we" then he cannot do so through his public position of whiteness that is outside of and in opposition to "we." Instead, Commenter One can be read as arguing for a community that unifies around the very experiences of marginalized people, making visible the white, public position from which Nick stands in relation to this community.

In our interview, I asked Nick about this very blog. Although I do not perceive Nick as being aware of his position as a position of whiteness within (or in contrast to) this community, his reflection regarding this blog does indicate that there has been a shift in his writing and sense of identity in relation to his community. To Nick, I stated, "I wanted to ask you what are your reactions or thoughts to some of the comments to your blog." Nick responds: "I want to preface this first by saying that was probably not the best way to write it, but it was... to register some sort of reaction. But ahh… it did include a lot of generalizations and stereotypes there, but I think it also had a point there" (Skype Interview 12/19/2010). In my general inquiry of this blog, Nick immediately anticipates my reading of it by claiming, "I want to preface this first..." This shows that Nick understands I could be interpreting his blog and comments as negative, and also indicates that he can inhabit the reader's position—an awareness that was not present in his blog or comments to visitors' responses. Furthermore, his admission that his writing is full of "generalizations and stereotypes" strongly suggests that comments from the community may have had an effect on Nick and how he now sees his own writing. Examining this blog alongside Nick's interview reveals his process of approximating his membership into/within an Asian-American community. While the blog itself may not show Nick's awareness in his own acts of generalizing others, our interview indicates that

such comments from community members can readjust his perceptions and representations of others—it argues for the evident recognition of how his own writing functions in the world. Also, Nick's use of "register" to describe his aim in this blog may be indicating that Nick intentionally seeks a reaction from others to help him comprehend and readjust his writing and position among others from the community; it is through community "reactions" that Nick approximates his formation in becoming Asian American.

In a more recent blog, Nick reflects on claims that highlight his tenuous connections to both his white/public and Asian/community identities, and further underscores his process of approximating an Asian-American identity. In fact, less than two weeks after the blog "Why Do All Muslims Overreact?" Nick posts a blog titled, "Inadequate" (12/02/2010). He writes:

> I feel like I am destined for mediocrity. Like I will never be great.
> I'm not tall enough.
> I'm not strong enough.
> I'm not smart enough.
> I'm not Korean enough.
> I'm not American enough.
> I'm not patient enough.

Unlike Angeline's fierce assertion of shifting sexual identities, Nick can be described as constructing negations of self. Indeed, these claims of inadequacy are not confident at all and seem to dis-locate Nick from any racial, ethnic, or cultural belongings—a significant contrast to his previous blog. Analyzing this blog provides interesting symmetry and asymmetry of identity negations that further show Nick's process of approximating an identity in relation to his community.

The lines, “not tall enough” and “not smart” enough can be attributed to Asian stereotypes of being “naturally” petite and academic overachievers. Also, the line, “not strong enough” can be, arguably, associated with a failure to meet white, male masculinity (Eng). But Nick’s last stance, “I’m not patient enough,” factors into this list as an odd negation in comparison to the rest of his claims. By reading this list as a negation of identities, “patient enough” can be seen as remarking on the previous negations. Here, I turn to Sarah Dorow’s work to help me theorize Nick’s text. Dorow examines transnational adoption (between white parents and Chinese adoptees) and its ties to ideologies of cultural economy, race, and gender. Although Nick is Korean, Dorow’s work remains applicable to Nick and many trans-global adoption experiences. In her work the author describes and analyzes a particular workshop that attempts to “facilitate adoptees’ collective and autobiographical *‘grope for a “self-regard” that does not yet exist’”* (my emphasis 265). Dorow’s portrayal of adoptees, I find, is an apt metaphor for explaining and understanding the significance of participants’ construction of a stable identity because, as participants have been suggesting so far, a sense of self—an identity platform—is needed from which to speak and to be recognized as a *belonging*, acknowledged subject (see chapter three). In particular, Dorow’s depiction of adoptees’ endeavor to understand their identity in-process is demonstrated by users like Nick, a participant who enacts this search for “a self-regard” on Xanga through textual approximations. Reading Nick’s line, “I’m not patient enough,” through this concept of approximation for “a self-regard” can suggest that Nick is “not patient” enough in finding who he is or how he belongs in the world, particularly when most of the world appears to be divided into an American (white) public and an unreceptive Korean community due to

his adopted (and perceived "broken" or uprooted ethnic) identity (Eleana J. Kim; Tae-Sun Kim).

Warranting further examination is how Nick can state these very negations on Xanga. That Nick presents his insecurities and estrangement to an online community reveals how Xanga affords Nick and participants who are still groping for a "self-regard" a site to speak and make sense of their dis-locations. Paradoxically, the readers to whom Nick confesses his lack-of-self and dis-location provide him the very location to voice his negations. In our interview, I asked Nick about his audience. The following is a selection from our exchange:

> Nick: I like writing and getting a positive feedback, but at the same time I'm not gonna, for lack of a better term, you know, like whore myself out. So, I've always been kind of… exclusive, kind of, like I been on friends lock or I'm always on sign-in-lock. And I just limit my associations, which I feel tends to ahh… forge stronger bonds and more meaningful interactions.
> Me: So the people you would let in through a sign-in or friend lock, do you consider them a part of the community?
> Nick: Yes. […]
> Me: Like, how much do you value their comments on your blog?
> Nick: Ah…. I value them a lot. I mean… again, I don't write solely for people. But,… if I do write a blog that's directed towards other people, like sometimes I would just write some introspective crap that's just for me, which for whatever reason a lot of people like to comment on […] I feel like a medium such as Xanga, people don't get to know you as a person, and you can hang out and all, but they… I mean, they, it's quite a contradiction at times. I mean, you can know someone in person, and you can hang out and all, but they don't know your deepest and darkest thoughts or whatever, versus Xanga, you never met them and they know all these secrets. […] So… I think when I write those introspective things, or whatever, it gives them the opportunity to get a deeper look into who I am.

Unlike Chris and Angeline, Nick is less likely to write to a public (although Angeline eventually places her writing on private) because in some ways he is already aligned with a public from growing up as, what he perceives, culturally white. Instead,

Nick admits that he remains more “exclusive” and mostly limits his associations to his Xanga community. As the above excerpt illustrates, Nick finds value in writing to his community because he finds that such interactions provide him “stronger bonds and more meaningful interactions.” These interactions, though, are shown to be much more complex as Nick goes on to explain. His “introspective crap” that he cannot or will not share with people “in person,” possibly due to shame or guilt for seeming ungrateful for being adopted (see Lee),[29] is something that he can express to others in this online community. For Nick, Xanga’s distance from his offline associations is productive for him to share his “secrets” because his community does, in fact, support Nick in his endeavor to discover his Asian-ness, away from the gaze of whiteness.

Examining the comments to Nick’s blog, “Inadequate,” shows that readers attempt to relate to and support Nick, although readers may not share in similar adoptive experiences. For example, Commenter One states, “i’m not good enough for my parents.” Nick does not mention his parents at all in this blog, but Commenter One creates a connection to Nick’s blog through her own experiences of feeling inadequate for her parents, a feeling that many users (Aaron and Chris) share, and many theorists have examined as a characteristic of second-generation Asians and Asian Americans (Reyes, Min). Although Commenter One cannot support Nick through mutual adoptee experiences, she does attempt to “forge” a stronger bond in relating her feelings that emerge from an Asian and/or Asian-American context. In fact, the majority of responses to Nick attempt to support Nick through shared feelings of inadequacy and a few of these

[29] Lee theorizes how Korean adoptees’ complex feelings of guilt can emerge from resenting their parents for adopting them because of how this act estranged them from their birth country and how different they were in relation to their white family and community. Some of these feelings may also emerge from adoptees’ resentment over their parents’ failure to expose them to their ethnic heritage.

posts extend such support by suggesting that Nick transform his inadequacies into something more positive. Commenter Two writes, "I feel the same way right now too. Like what a commenter said above, look for the things you like about yourself and grow on that." Another person states, "I feel you in this post though. There are plenty of times I feel how you feel… HOWEVER, there are more times that I can convince myself that I am awesome" (Commenter Three).

As someone who grew up isolated from other Asians and Asian Americans, it follows that Nick is more interested in discovering how to belong to a community of Asian Americans to, as mentioned earlier, "Asianify" himself. But as these comments from his community indicate, the process of belonging is not something that Nick can just simply find through asserting himself into an ad hoc community. Instead, it requires members from a community reaching out to Nick in order to readdress Nick's self-negations by both sharing their own negations and encouraging Nick to work beyond negative formations of self, as evidenced in his interview: "I think when I write those introspective things, or whatever, it gives them the opportunity to get a deeper look into who I am." In this way, Nick's adoptee experience is not what frames his access to this community but, rather, his experience of feeling inauthentic in his own Asian body and the rhetorical moves of self-negation provides other members discursive access through similar feelings of lack rather than similar material and cultural experiences. This also suggests that collective formations of race can be constructed around similar feelings of negations and affirmations—a rhetorical construct of race—rather than biologically and culturally inherited concepts and understandings of race. In looking at Nick's writing over time, I argue that Nick is grappling with Commenter One's remarks from the

previous blog “Why Do All Muslims Overreact?” and her implication that the community coalesces around such experiences and histories of marginalization; Nick’s dislocations from his static identities allows him to approximate and relocate among and within his community.

Chris: “I am just an average ninja” and Claiming Normativity Through Stable Identity Formations

Nick illuminates how public, as a static position, can inform his writing to the community and how, in turn, the community responds in a discursive and recursive process that helps Nick approximate a new identity. But not all participants include the public in ways Nick does, although Nick shares similar experiences of being rejected due to his racialized body. In fact, many participants describe their childhoods as feeling alienated by the public, but the same participants also speak of moments where they are made to feel isolated from their ethnic collective when family and/or community members disparage them for being too culturally white and not ethnically authentic enough. These experiences motivate users to find acceptance through other means on Xanga. Unlike Nick, the majority of participants engage with Xanga not because their main motivation is to learn more about being Asian or Asian American. Rather, they bring to Xanga their experiences and beliefs regarding their own racial and collective identities. Chris, one of my more vocal and engaged participants, represents the majority of participants’ and their process in stabilizing identities. Stability for Chris emerges from combining community and public imaginaries in different ways than Nick. Chris reclaims a public stereotype of the “ninja” as a stealthy, superhuman, and typically faceless figure in the public consciousness by revising it within a community imaginary in which he is supported, admired, but not made to feel othered. Chris indicates that such

stability affords him a confident positionality, a community-supported location from which to speak to the public. Chris is able to claim his version of an Asian-American identity because such claims are readily accepted by other members in his community. Chris and his writing are not treated as different from the public's conception of "American," nor is he subject to doubts of being authentically Chinese or Asian enough by an ethnic enclave. Such experiences allow him the space to stabilize his identity as Asian American. That is, he is able to rhetorically construct an identity that combines his Asian and American sides and experiences.

Chris is a 19 year-old male who self identifies as "Chinese/Fujian," ethnically, and "American" racially. He is well-known among the Xanga community and others would describe his online persona as likable and outspoken. Chris describes himself as being a "complete open book" and "outgoing" as a writer on Xanga and I find him often writing about his past and current struggles within his ethnic enclave where his sense of belonging is continuously challenged by his family. In our interview, Chris talks about how his mother told Chris he is the shame of the family because he is not able to speak his home language as proficiently as she expects. He explains,

> … my mom is like the first one to graduate college… she's ah, she's the first one to graduate college from her side of the family. And… yeah… and ah… so a lot of people look up to her. And when they had me, they [his parents] expected, "you know what, you are going to do great things also." I turned out very normal. Not even normal… I had no real outstanding abilities, and… I couldn't speak my own language, and then I started becoming the shame of the family, actually. And my mom, like, after one random conversation, she said, "because of you, I'm the… my family is so ashamed of me." (Skype Interview 12/12/2010)

Failed familial and community expectations to be culturally and linguistically "outstanding" cause Chris to feel inauthentic when he believes he is not able to meet such

expectations. His sense of not feeling like be belongs at home is so stark that he recalls signing up for any afterschool activities in order to have excuses for not coming home (Skype Interview 12/12/2010). This experience of being made to feel inadequate due to language inabilities is something that other participants also address in their interviews (Alex, Angeline, Nick, and Raquel). In our interview, Alex confirms that he often comes across this experience written by other participants (such as Chris) while experiencing it himself. Alex's excerpt is typical of many Asian-American users on Xanga and extends Chris' passage:

> [T]he older Asian family members, they, they think you should know how to speak your language, all of it. You know, you should be very fluent to it. And then you have the issues where, okay, where someone is we call the "ABC," American Born Chinese, whatever, like we, because we live here, we live our life here. We are… we have more experience with English and that kinda clashes with the notion that we should know Chinese. So… so there's issues like that, like just identifying, you know, I wanna be,… for me for example, I wanna… I like my heritage, I like the fact that I'm Chinese. I also like to know that I'm also American, so… being here I actually would speak more English than Cantonese, but I do try to,… I do try to work on it. I wouldn't mind knowing more of Cantonese, but there are some issues where, you know, like certain, like other Asian-American people they know Cantonese better, and they talk to you and they kinda make fun of you for not knowing as much… and stuff like that. (In-person Interview 11/26/2010)

In this excerpt, Alex shows that the inadequate use of his home language signals his marginalized position among his ethnic collective. He is seen by members as not Asian enough to command his home language. That is, Alex's less-than-fluent use of Cantonese resulted in other Asian Americans teasing him because he is marked—through language inabilities—as outside of his ethnic and racial collective. How he connects language and identity are particularly significant; in the middle of this quote; Alex appears to fumble with the difficulty of explaining how his identity is related to these

notions of belonging: "…so there's issues like that, like just identifying, you know, I wanna be,…" Instead of finishing this sentence, Alex shifts to an example that highlights his identity through both his Chinese heritage and his American side by conveying his desire to hold on to both of them, a desire that indicates also the difficulty of embracing both. In the last sentence Alex suggests that "identifying" is not just a decision he can make on his own, but it is also an act that requires others'—the ethnic enclave—participation/consensus. In Alex's case, his family members and "other Asian-American people," who have more ethnic status and capital on the basis of their language proficiency, use language to establish Alex's dubious identification to his ethnic community, effectively disciplining him about what it means to be Chinese: in this case, speaking Cantonese (a Chinese dialect) proficiently, an implication that culture and language are inextricably intertwined. To belong, for Alex, is not just a matter of saying this is so—it is not one-sided—but requires recognition on the community's part. As participants in this study show and as Asian-American scholars underscore, such recognition as ethnically "authentic" employs language as a measure of authenticity and, hence, belonging (Reyes).

Similarly, Chris addresses this theme of intercultural tensions in many of his blog posts. One particular post sees him recount growing up with a "Tiger mom"—a label for Asian mothers who are imagined to be strict in their children's upbringing, and made famous by Amy Chua's recent book, *The Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* (2/24/2011). The Tiger Mom highly publicized controversy prompts Chris to reflect on his childhood and he writes, "Everything I did was 'mediocre'. Even though in comparison to the peers around me, I was above average, but in the eyes of my parent's [sic], if I wasn't in First, I

was in Last." He goes on to describe, "Slowly, I was dying inside and started losing my sense of self […] At home, I was the obedient child who would never say a word and do his job. At school, I was a goofball who loved his friends, and treated them like family, because I never felt that I had a 'real' family at home." Chris ends this blog with cautionary advice to potential and current Tiger Moms of the possibly damaging ways that such upbringings can cause their children. But, he also addresses users who are raised by a Tiger Mom: "You are not alone, and there are people who can help you understand and help you go through with this. Just remember this, you are not Asian, you are Asian American; you are your own person, not someone else's. That's what got me through in the end."

Chris' conclusion struck me as important due to his bifurcated address to Tiger Moms and fellow users raised by Tiger Moms. On one hand, he is calling out to both audiences based on their identities/identifications. The former audience is made up of Tiger Moms and even if potential, they are not likely to read this blog. (I have not come across any in my own participation, and the age skew toward a younger population of users makes it unlikely that there are a significant amount of Tiger Moms reading Chris' blogs.) Chris invokes the latter audience differently by constructing a shared experience based on his own and others' racialized identity of "Asian American." His show of support to users going through "this" not only suggests that he is part of the "people," the center that "can help" others, but this passage also reclaims "Asian American" in a particular way. The organization of this blog starts with a personal narrative detailing how Chris' experiences with "strict" and "traditional" parents has caused him to spiral into depression in his teens. But ending his blog with defining Asian along these

negative experiences allows Chris to emphasize Asian American in a more positive light, relative to Asian. In fact, one can read Chris as rewriting Asian American beyond the image of a "strict" childhood, which implicates his familial and ethnic enclave as just "Asian" (evidenced by the phrase, "you are not Asian"). That is, Chris conflates Asian with his ethnic enclave. To be Asian is to remain in the familial sphere and to belong to one's parents. Conversely, to be Asian American is to be one's "own person," an identity that Chris celebrates while encouraging other readers to adopt it as their own.

If Chris does not see the formation of his Asian-American identity happening in his ethnic enclave, the broader public arenas may provide him this experience. But data (and various participants: Alex, buttonoser, Coolmonkey, Geoff, Nick, Raquel, and utoppia) also illustrate the racist and marginalizing experiences Chris confronts outside of the home. For instance, Alex and Raquel recount stories when strangers would ask them "Where are you [or your parents] from?" (In-person Interview 11/26/2010; Skype Interview 9/18/2010). As scholars note, this question is uttered from a belief that all Asian people are foreigners, rather than American (Young). When at college, Chris also went through similar racist moments. He states, "I became like a token" when other students would differentiate him, even in friendly banter, addressing him as "yo, Asian." Chris also depicts experiences at work, in which his coworkers would ask him if he ate scorpions, like they do on TV (Skype Interview 12/12/2010). These everyday moments of racism that marginalize Chris and other Asian Americans from public arenas are what Omi and Winant consider "Racial Formation as Everyday Experience," or a micro formation of race (59). Omi and Winant go on to argue that, "Our ability to interpret racial meanings depends on preconceived notions of a racialized social structure."

Therefore, comments such as, *You don't act black/white/fill in the blank* or *Do you eat scorpions?* "testify to the way a racialized social structure shapes racial experiences and conditions meaning" (59).

In analyzing Chris's experience through this lens, I argue that Chris (and other participants) are constructed as token and as Other, acts that deny him a (significant) representational and ideological location in the structuring of the public. This is further reflected in his screen name, verified_but_still_denied, which Chris believes expresses his experiences in not belonging to any particular group. Indeed, in his coworkers' suggestion that Chris eats exoskeleton creatures, and that this happens on TV, is the implication that his body signifies an indigenous specialty highlighted on, perhaps, *Globe Trekker* or a Discovery Channel show, and functions to place him outside the norm, and beyond the public imaginary. Chris explains,

> Well, coming across from my username, definitely, verified_but_still_denied, ahh… coz that's how it is, how I always felt like, um… I was always accepted that I was Chinese, but I never really acknowledged that I was… like, I was always like, oh, you're an outsider. And then other people, they would accept me as a person, but then they would always ostracize me as, he's that random Asian kid.

His acknowledgement that "I was always like, oh, you're an outsider" from his own Chinese identity is significant on two points: Chris switches from an "I," first-person position to a second-person, "you're," and goes on to separate further his own identity from "other people," people whom he attributes to his college and work experiences—people whom he conceives of as "outside the home" (Skype Interview 12/12/2010). I read his switch from first-person singular to second-person as underscoring his feelings of being an outsider: he sees himself outside looking in at a place in which he *should* belong. Chris's repositioning of himself in these ways speaks to the continuous

movement and momentum that Geoff also demonstrates with "Asian Diaspora" (see chapter three). Yet, Chris's movement from his ethnic community does not necessarily mean that he moves outward to align himself with the broader public, but rather Chris also feels negated from the public, as noted by being treated as "that random Asian kid."

Chris does not see his identity completely acknowledged in his ethnic enclave and, in addition, he believes that the broader public also rejects him through these ostracizing and racist moments. By reading these experiences as lacking in both of these offline arenas, it makes sense that Chris expresses how Xanga provides him some "freedom" from his rejection offline. Such experience of rejection is what I call a *double negation* at the community/ethnic and public/white sites, and, for Chris and many other participants their Asian-American identity emerges from this double negation rather from only one particular site of social or cultural engagement. Xanga, then, affords participants to be "free" (or as free as possible) from these cultural expectations at home and imposed visual/racial stereotypes that their body signifies in the broader public. Xanga's figurative and literal blank pages allow participants to explore and claim Asian-American identities that are not just one or the other, but both and neither. While I do not mean to imply that Xanga, as a social network site, is free from its own expectations, ideologies, and limitations, this site allows users to write themselves as belonging to a community and public, effectively revising their relationships to these spaces in transformative ways.

Although theorists have addressed Asian Americans' simultaneous experiences of inauthenticity and alienation within the community and home enclave and in their broader public arenas (Kibria; Reyes; and Ono and Pham), I am interested in how

participants' relationship to their community and public offline informs their online relationships with these imaginaries through discursive means and movements. I go beyond these studies to demonstrate that participants' experience of alienation can result in much more complex writing and identity formation because writers construct multiple audiences and writing orientations that rarely coincide. Participants are shown to address a specific audience, while orientating themselves to another and vice versa. I attempt to capture this combination of audience and orientation in using the term *imaginary*. I turn now to how imaginaries can function for writers by examining one of Chris's blogs.

On June 24, 2010, Chris posted a blog entitled, "For those who would like to start shit with me." By reading this particular blog against Chris's various data, I see the blog as a powerful assertion-of-self—addressing a strange public but orientated to both community and public audiences—and opening up a community-public site of dialogue in which his identity is acknowledged by these two audiences. Chris starts this blog by declaring a caution to people he perceives as "Haters" on this site. He writes, "Hello Haters, Before any of you start any crap with me, I just thought it would be nice to let you know what my credentials are before you ensue verbal/physical harassment against me." Chris goes on to list his credentials:

> I have taken business law, criminal law, and constitutional law; and have done quite well in all courses. So anything you say or do against me or my friends, I will find a way to ruin your ass, legally. My English is probably better than yours. After 4 years of ESL, and beating the Chinese out of me; my usage of the English vernacular is either par or above your level of usage…

This list goes on for a while longer and includes his code of Chivalry, his religious knowledge from various cultures, and his reading "for fun." Most striking is his much longer list of martial arts skills, which includes "Wing Chun, Karate, Krav Maga" and his

use of weapons: "Throwing Knife, Nun-chucks, Spear, and Staff." This particular blog received 369 views and 94 comment responses. When I asked Chris to extend on his use of "Haters" in our interview, he describes them as strangers outside of his community, yet within the realm of public, given that anyone can be a Hater as long as he or she is on Xanga and wants to "start shit" with Chris. In this way, Chris deliberately invokes a 'public' audience at the same time he implicitly seeks community, knowing that others in similar situations will also be reading his blog.

As is typical of his other blogs, many of his community readers provided him with supporting comments that work to affirm his assertion of self. For example, one community commenter writes, "I don't want to mess with that resume." Another one exclaims, "wow, that's incredible!!!! I'm almost 24 and my biggest accomplishment is my typing speed and my high score in 5 pin bowling :([emoticon for unhappy face] You put me to shame, haha." But among these supportive and confirming comments are ones that obviously come from people who are not in Chris's community, and, yet, are compelled to read his blog and respond. One visitor writes: "You sound awesome :) I'd love to learn martial art[s], I respect someone who has that training, nevermind how much you have!! Incredible, how old are you?! Geez!" This affirming comment, coming from a stranger to Chris, contrasts with the comments made by his fellow college students and his coworkers. Furthermore, the acknowledgement from a public audience is important to Chris because, as he explains in his interview, "other people, [in referencing people outside of the home] they would accept me as a person, but then they would always ostracize me as, he's that random Asian kid." He goes on to say right after, "I'm looking for acceptance on my blog." Again, we see here the tension between

addressing a public he assumes does *not* accept him by addressing "haters," with his desire for acceptance both within and outside the community of bloggers.

In responding to a commenter who asks Chris to explain Bruce Lee's fighting styles, Chris states, "I'm just an average ninja." Such identity claims create a discursive site that invites others to discuss and explore meanings around "average ninja" as an everyday experience on the same level as being a student or reading. To be clear, Chris does not see himself like Bruce Lee, configured as an Asian icon for American consumption, but this claim that Chris is "just an average ninja" also revises a popular figure in the public and popular imaginary. By framing "ninja" as average, Chris reclaims this identity as normal, rather than an exotic and mystical figure from the Far East, similar to figures made exotic and distant in their scorpion consumption on TV. Implicated as a martial artist, he rewrites this figure into one that is ordinary, and fitting within the order of his other self-assertions. This melding that celebrates his English rather than rejects him on the grounds of his Chinese language inabilities, that promotes his martial arts skills alongside his knowledge of law and legality, allows him to be that "random Asian kid" who is admired and accepted, rather than ostracized for his inauthenticity as ethnic enough, or his foreignness within an Americanized (read: white) public conception.

It is in his survey response that Chris clarifies how Xanga functions to merge his community and public imaginaries. He writes,

> Personally, I try to play myself as a guy who lives life normally and is just stuck between the cultures of America and Asia. But then again, I think that's what the majority of Asian America Xangans do. Trying to find a balance between the life we grow up with outside the house and in the house. And on Xanga, there's a balance for us I guess.

We can see Chris offering a similar interpretation in his own writing when he depicts his position in-between Asian and American cultures as a balancing act, and in addition, it is Xanga that allows him to strike this balance and portray himself as *normal* in doing so. By asserting his sense of self on Xanga and carving out a site in which community and public members discuss cultural distinctions while supporting his identity, Chris is able to claim both Asian and American cultures and identities as his own and to revise his relationship to the community and public imaginaries as ones in which he belongs. In this way we can see Chris using both the community and public audiences and their responses within the larger network of meaning to both recreate and assert a new "average ninja identity." It provides Chris confidence and locality that, in turn, allows him to address his experiences of negation. Both community and public, in fact, are seen as functioning imaginaries for his writing motivations and as audiences for Chris' actual writing production, and provide him a way to claim a normalized Asian *and* American identity that can exist in and span across these two spaces of socialization and meaning-making.

Angeline: "Yes, I am bisexual," "queer or gay," and "pansexual": Reconfiguring Static and Stable Identities

Nick and Chris demonstrate how different writers are using community and public imaginaries for different reasons and in varying degrees. While Nick engages a community in order to dismantle his static identity position, Chris places the community and public in tension so as to construct a stable identity. But participants also place static and stable identities in tension, in addition to community-public imaginaries, to create identity claims that function to simultaneously accommodate and dismantle identities. I turn to Angeline to examine and represent these complex identity/identifying movements

occurring on Xanga. Angeline shows that she concurrently stabilizes particular identities in order to deconstruct others. Such simultaneous movements highlight the complexity of identity formation as it underscores the process in which writers can engage multiple aspects of their identity to achieve specific writing aims. Instead of merely acknowledging that intersectional identities are important, I see Angeline clearly illustrating how different identities are activated, made stable, or dismantled in service of other identity formations. Angeline not only places community and public in tension, she intentionally constructs these imaginaries as a rhetorical strategy compelling both community and public readers to align with her perspective. In doing so, Angeline broadens community and public understandings of Asian American as inclusive of multiple- and pan-sexualities.

Through stabilizing certain racial and gender roles, Angeline is able to claim shifting sexual identities that challenge readers in both the public and community spheres, while affording her the confidence in being heard by these audiences. In other words, Angeline's writing balances the need to be recognized by readers in both imaginaries with the desire to exceed their expectations of sexual identities as traditional and made-for-consumption. Her claims, then, are not as clear-cut as Chris's address to the community-public imaginary. Rather, Angeline's identities initially challenge both audiences and demonstrate that placing community and public in direct tension with each other allows her to emerge as a credible author to both audiences, rather than one who may be suspected of being fake or "wishy-washy" (Blog 12/16/2009). Although Angeline's claim to a multi-sexual identity is atypical on this site, the community-public tension she constructs in her writing also functions to reaffirm her membership within her

community and portrays her as a supported and confident speaker to the public. While Angeline imagines her community and public from a different position than Chris, her posts affirming her membership in the community and her confidence with the public is similar to Chris's identity moves. Both participants are able to rewrite themselves as part of the community and public imaginary, but Angeline acquires this claiming and rewriting from different positionalities, entailing differing identity formations and rhetorical moves; her sexual identities require Angeline to write herself into being through more subversive and complex means than some participants and writers on this site.

Angeline is one of the few female participants in this study and one reason why I am including her in this chapter: she represents some of the challenges of being a female, Asian-American user on Xanga.[30] But also, Angeline's writing straddles both typical and atypical formations of identity on Xanga. Angeline is atypical of many of the users (both male and female) on this site because she aligns with different sexual identities at various points of her engagement with Xanga, but typical in how she draws on common "Asian" images in order to anchor her less stable identities. Angeline's intersection of race, gender, and sexualities creates different challenges than Chris and most users on Xanga for being "recognized" as normal and/or accepted by readers, especially when this combination of identities may be (and has been) pursued and consumed as an Asian fetish (see Nguyen Tu). As a writer who embraces her "lesbian," "bisexual," and "pansexual" identities (Blogs), Angeline's claim to shifting sexualities contrasts with Chris' assertion of a stable ninja-as-Asian-American identity. Yet, Angeline's desire to identify with a

[30] For a detailed explanation on gender differences and practices among the studied community, please refer to chapter two.

constantly transforming sexuality is juxtaposed against more stable and, at times, stereotypical representations of herself as an Asian woman. Like Chris, Angeline seeks to normalize her assertion of self through acceptance from her various audiences; but unlike Chris, she constructs and embraces the "nerd" and "gamer" image that Chris considers a negative association with Asian Americans (Skype Interview 12/12/2010), an association that tends to be seen as negative by many men in this study due to how such representations have been used to de-masculinize Asian men.[31] Furthermore, her assertion of identity is noteworthy in how Angeline stakes a claim in the very instability of sexual identity as fluid and ever-changing. Angeline demands that readers view her in this unconventional and permissive light, and such demands confront readers with identity as a complex and changing constellation of race, gender, and sexuality.

Angeline is a 20-year-old college student who self-identifies as "Taiwanese-American" ethnically and "Asian" racially. She grew up in what she considers a "strict" Christian family. In her survey, Angeline discloses, "my experiences in growing up are present in my often rambling about my father or sexual orientation as a child of two traditional Taiwanese parents." Angeline's responses in both her survey and interview portray her as insightful and aware of raced issues occurring around her and aware of herself as a raced subject. For instance, she writes,

> When I write my blogs, the subject of race is an oft-wrung subject in my weblogs due to the fact that it does affect me. The focus on race in my life

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[31] I have observed that many male users on this site do not espouse this image and surveys and interviews evidence most male participants conceive of this image as negative. Participants like Chris, Mark, Nick, Jose, Coffee_Kaioken, and Raquel speak to this negative representation of Asians and Asian Americans in the media and broader public. But, Coffee_Kaioken (a 21-year-old male, "American" (ethnic) "Indian" (race)) and Raquel (a 19-year-old female, "American" (ethnic) and "Black and Filipina" (race)), like Angeline, embrace their nerdy-gamer identity on Xanga. The other participants, instead, distance themselves from identifying with these representations while online, even if they may self-identify as such offline (Mark).

> both frustrates me but also empowers me—it frustrates me that our society puts so much emphasis (often unfair) on different races, but also because everyone's diverse backgrounds are all very intriguing. (survey)

I discovered her profile through the "Asian Diaspora" blogring and, additionally, other participants suggested that I "check out" Angeline's profile when I mentioned my research. In fact, Chris and Angeline used to be friends in grade school, before Angeline moved. After a few years of separation, these two participants "accidently" discovered that they knew each other from school after subscribing and reading each other's posts for a while. Although addressing diasporic experiences for Asian-American users is beyond the scope of this study, I believe it warrants pointing out that Angeline and Chris, in sharing similar ethnic and public tensions, both ended up on Xanga. This further supports some participants' beliefs that Xanga is dominated by Asian Americans because it is able to address Asian Americans' collective experiences of feeling alienated in their offline lives (Bryan, Sonlay, Alexander, and Chris). Angeline, in particular, comes across as conflicted in her assertions of strong emotions and "fuck you" attitude with her "I don't care" sentiments. In our interview, Angeline appears nonchalant when commenting on her blogs about her identity. For instance, when I asked her if she believes her blogs about gaming portrayed her as a stereotypically "nerdy" Asian, she states, "I don't care." Below is the selection from our interview. I am referencing Angeline's blog about Dark Dawn (12/1/2010), a video game that Angeline writes about:

> Me: So on a broader scale, do you think that Asians get tied to an the [sic] video-game playing, nerdy-geeky image?
> Angeline: oh yeah, of course
> Me. How do you feel about possibly promoting that image through this blog?
> Angeline: i don't care haha
> Angeline: i enjoy what I enjoy

> Angeline: i don't really reveal that I like video games and that i'm geeky in person, so it's kind of an online-only thing for me
> (Instant Messaging Interview 2/24/2011)

Angeline indicates, in this passage, that she is not concerned with coming across as a stereotype herself or promoting what other participants have pointed out as negatively limiting. In fact, Angeline seems to be okay with embracing this particular geek and gamer identity on Xanga. Yet she ends this passage by disclosing that her "geeky" persona is something for "online-only" and not something she can or wants to claim for her offline contexts. While other participants are quick to distance themselves from this nerdy, gamer image on Xanga, Angeline may be indicating that she feels free to claim an identity that tends to be associated with Asian Americans. Thus, Xanga allows her to inhabit even a well-worn stereotype without feeling as if this is a limitation. In this instance, Xanga's ability to provide Angeline such opportunities is underscored by how she confesses she cannot or will not expose this identity offline, similar to Chris's claiming and normalizing of ninja. As an identity that other participants negatively associate with Asians, Angeline's "So what?" approach normalizes this identity by decreasing its importance as something that is laughable (indicated by her "hahah) and obvious, as noted by her statement, "i enjoy what i enjoy."

Angeline's nonchalant and unapologetic claim to the nerdy-gamer stereotype rhetorically works against the hyper-visibility and "naturalizing" of the Asian body as tech-savvy by framing it as an ordinary preference that emerges from her, instead of a reading/interpretation of her body imposed by others. Yet, the ideological and cultural forces promoting the image of Asian Americans as tech-savvy are not new. In fact, Rachel Lee and Sau-lingWong theorize this image of Asians as technologically superior

(and naturally suited for technology-related labor) and *as technology* in the very ways they are seen as a mass, robotic workforce: ambivalent versions of the Yellow Peril trope. The authors write,

> As documented by historians on nineteenth- and twentieth-century immigration to the United States, Asians have been contradictorily imagined as, on the one hand, machine-like workers, accomplishing "inhuman" feats of "coolie" manual labor, and on the other, as brainiac competitors whose technological adeptness ranges from inventing gunpowder to being good with engineering and math. […] the yellow body jacked into silicon chips and E-bay… (xiv)

Lee and Wong argue that such images of Asians and Asian Americans simplify and dehumanize this racialized population and, as I argued in chapter one, these associations also discipline other marginal races for not being "jacked in" or not intellectually adept enough for new media technology, thus working to disservice all marginal groups (see Kynard). The hyper-visibility of Asian bodies as tech-savvy and the hyper-attention around other people of color as technologically un-savvy (with issues of access) absences white bodies in structuring power dynamics through ideological associations between race and technology. It is no wonder, then, that such readings of Asian bodies prompt participants like Chris, Mark, Nick, and even Angeline to distance themselves from the gamer-nerdy persona, at least offline. To be seen as "for labor" or as only "brainiacs" is limiting for these participants. Sonlay remarks, "this expectation makes it seem that is all we are" (Instant Messaging Interview 2/28/2011).

To better understand and theorize Angeline's identity formation requires examining the intersection of race, gender, and sexuality among other users and the dominant, male voices on this site. While Sonlay articulates that he wants to be seen as *also* funny and as a more complete person in our interview, participants like Chris seem

to be rejecting this stereotype on the grounds of how it genders him. In other words, Chris takes offense to such images because it appears to feminize him. In our interview, he states, “I’m not your typical Asian male.” When I asked him to explain what he means, Chris illustrates that a “typical Asian guy” is someone who “[plays] computer games.” In recounting what a friend said to him, Chris mimics his friend’s words: “you’re one of the only Asians I’ve met that can probably get a non-Asian chick.” Chris goes on to respond, “Thank you, but I don’t know how to feel about that.” I read Chris sensing something problematic about this back-handed compliment, but at the same time Chris aligns the typical Asian male with nerdy, book smart, and computer savvy. This “typical male,” according to Chris’s friend, cannot “get” girls who are non-Asian and suggests that Asian men who are able to date non-Asian women are not nerdy or computer-savvy. In other words, Chris celebrates his atypical Asianness because he does not want to be coded in a way that makes them less appealing or attractive to non-Asian women. To be seen as an atypical Asian male, according to Chris’s logic, is to reject such associations with being tech-savvy and to move toward being a typical (American) male who may have the cultural-racial capital for “getting with” non-Asian girls.

Comprehending why some of the male participants distance themselves from a nerdy-gamer image allows us to view Angeline’s habitation of this identity as speaking from a recognizable position (a *male* identity) while simultaneously promoting less recognizable formations around constantly changing sexual identities. Angeline tends to combine her various identities together in her visual and textual productions that place community and public imaginaries in tension. Her complex identity positions and imaginaries make it difficult for community and public audiences to dismiss or ignore her

claims to various identities. At the very least, readers from both spheres are confronted with atypical identity formations along with typical ones, and are asked to re-orientate themselves in the process of consuming familiar identities and narratives. These complex identity and community-public formations can be seen in Angeline's posts dated 12/16/2009. This blog portrays Angeline's various sexual orientations and present a more comprehensive sense of how she rhetorically constructs imaginaries as she claims various sexual identities. In this blog titled "finally, people are STFU--ing [shut the fuck up--ing] about bisexuality FINALLY," Angeline begins her writing with a declaration: "I am angry today." She goes on to write the following:

> I haven't been checking xanga because one, *you people* have been super annoying with your "bisexuality" posts. So I'm glad lately I haven't found any stupid weblogs that have been rec'd to me or *from idiots that I subscribe* to who say "LALALALA I HATE BISEXUALzzz ETC" Yeah, good for you, now go fuck yourself. I've also been playing maplestory (LOOOL yeah yeah, so what it's cute :3) [emoticon for cute] on the new server as an Aran… (my emphasis)

In this excerpt, Angeline's use of "you people" and "idiots" refers to the public writers who have had their blogs recommended to Angeline by other users who are most likely part of Angeline's own community. Readers from her community also are more likely to read this blog than public readers who are writing these "annoying" posts condemning or criticizing bisexuality. Angeline's start to this post, then, can be interpreted as an attempt to incorporate the public imaginary as a rhetorical device aimed at influencing the community. But Angeline ends this section with a sudden shift to describing her gaming activities ("I've also been playing maplestory"). Reading this admission of gaming interests against the backdrop of gaming identities as typically tied to Asian, male bodies provides an insightful interpretation of Angeline's blog. In the span of a few sentences,

Angeline manages to claim a typically male stereotype that has been used to feminize Asian men after suggesting a particular view of sexuality through her denunciation of public writers. If the gamer identity is typically recognized by the public in specifically disparaging ways, Angeline's adoption of this identity can be seen to stabilize her bisexual, female identity through a highly recognizable image while simultaneously destabilizing the gamer identity as only Asian and male through her gender and sexual identities. On one hand, Angeline may be using public expectations of race (the gamer as Asian male) to subvert community and public understandings of gender and sex. On the other hand, Angeline may be destabilizing public and community expectations of the gamer identity through her less stable sexual and gender identities. These readings, though, are not exclusive of each other and both are potential readings for readers given their own positions vis-à-vis this community and public. The multiple readings of this blog ensure that a broader range of readers are being addressed and challenged by Angeline's intersections of identity and imaginaries.

Furthermore, in opening this blog with a declaration of her feelings, "I am angry today," Angeline sets up an immediately compelling tone for the rest of her blog. But as one reads on to the next sentence of her blog, Angeline creates an interesting gap in which her feelings of anger, situated in "today," are tied to other users' postings on bisexuality that happened at previous points in her recalled past. In reading that Angeline is "glad" not to find any "stupid" posts on this matter, the declaration of anger seems odd; it would make more sense that she is not angry but opens with a declaration of relief or pleasantness. That is, she is recalling these posts that do not make sense in their relationship to her immediate anger. But such a textual performance of anger

affords Angeline a charged exigency and platform from which to address the imaginary and constructed audience of "you people" and "idiots" she subscribes to as part of her weblogs. In other words, her recalled experiences of reading posts opposing bisexuality are propelled into the immediate context through Angeline's claim to anger.

Angeline's revelation that these posts also come from people who she chooses to subscribe to may come across as problematic. Clearly, she can easily unsubscribe from these people who are writing about bisexuality in ways that Angeline does not like; it can be seen as an admission that undercuts her credibility. But a different reading of this passage suggests that Angeline intentionally constructs and challenges the "idiots" who write these blogs and who may be part of her community since they recommended these posts to her. In fact, her subscription can be interpreted as *creating* credibility because of how she has first-hand knowledge of these posts. This reading is supported by Sonlay's comment: "I didn't know there was a bisexual phase going on xanga. I am always out of the loop." Sonlay's unawareness of these postings allows Angeline to assert her knowledge about the site and places her in a position of power, particularly because Sonlay is, in fact, a well-known and active member on this site. By knowing something Sonlay does not, Angeline may be securing her membership among the community to which both Sonlay and Angeline belong.

In narrating her sentiments regarding these "public" posts, Angeline goes on to bring her own claims of bisexuality to the forefront. She continues after the passage above:

> Yes, I am bisexual.
> But I am not wishy-washy about it. I am not confused with whether or not I like guys or girls. I like both. However, I have only dated guys. Since I was raised in a Christian family, it was extremely difficult to accept that

> fact that I may have attraction to the opposite gender. […] I like both males and females, but maybe not equally. I think it's more accurate to say I am a pansexual. […] and you must be an idiot if you rule out an entire population criteria that falls under this unfortunate category and blankly assume etc. […]

Angeline concludes her post with the following: "Anyway. I finished my finals. :D [big happy face]." Flanking Angeline's blog that attempts to claim and stabilize a "pansexual" identity are two inclusions that do not have much to do with how others may be "hating" bisexuals or how she negotiates her sexual identities. Instead, Angeline ends her first paragraph with what seems to be a random comment: "I've also been playing maplestory [an online multi-player, role-playing game]." She also concludes her blog with a tangent to her topic on sexuality: "I finished my finals."

These flanking statements appear to have very little to do with her constructed argument and anger against anti-bisexual writers, but in examining the comments to Angeline's blog, it is clear that readers use the less controversial and more recognizable book-smart, nerdy-gamer identities to access this blog and Angeline's treatment of bisexuality. To demonstrate, Alexander, another participant, writes, "WOOT! Congrats on finishing finals. =D [very happy face]." A different commenter states, "you go girl :) i love maplestory :D" (Commenter One). These sorts of responses that include references to the maplestory game, finals, or both reflect about two-thirds out of the 26 comments from community and public visitors. While some of the commenters do address Angeline's defense of her bisexual identity, the number of responses addressing the school-nerdy-gamer identity is noteworthy, particularly due to how little space it takes compared to the rest of the blog on bisexuality: two out of the forty-nine sentences that constitute the whole blog are about maplestory and finals. That so many commenters

gravitate toward Angeline's school-nerdy-gamer identities supports the rhetorical intentions with which Angeline constructs this blog.

These specific identities (school-girl, nerdy, gamer) are easily recognizable to both the community and public, and can function to orientate readers to the rest of the piece in which Angeline's identity and claims are not so easily followed, recognized, or accepted by the community and public. This can be seen with a different response: "Congrats on finishing your finals. I think I totally missed the bisexual post trend. Meh. ☺ But this was a great post. And at the risk of sounding kinda creepy… there is something ridiculously beautiful about you. I'm sure it has at least a little to do with the awesomeness of your kick-@ss confidence. ☺" (Commenter Two). This particular commenter starts her response by connecting to Angeline's finals, but she then goes on to speak *around* the bisexual topic when she admits that she, too, missed out on the "trend" or when she compliments Angeline's confidence. Here, what is not said can be just as insightful; this commenter does not engage with Angeline's writing content and various sexual identity claims. Instead, she opens her response with addressing Angeline's completion of finals and then echoes other commenters' "missed" bisexual writing trend. The commenter ends her response by complimenting Angeline, with the implication that such confidence is due to Angeline's writing and stance on bisexuality. But this comment, as with most other comments on this blog, does not directly engage with Angeline's own identity claims as bisexual, but indirectly acknowledges it through compliments that frame Angeline's recognizable (school) and transgressive (bisexual) identities.

The most telling part of this response is the sentence, "And at the risk of sounding kinda creepy…" I read this as the responder's anxiety for not knowing how to position herself in her compliment to someone whose sexuality is unclear or unfamiliar. That is, the commenter may feel as if she is transgressing some boundary or cultural convention by declaring, "at the risk." Put another way, Commenter Two is risking misinterpretation by articulating a perspective that may not be aligned with who she is and what the surrounding culture expects from her as a member. In addition, the follow-up "sounding kinda creepy" underscores a preemptive move in which the commenter is afraid that her compliment may be seen as having a different agenda. If interpreted as a preemptive act to potential misreadings, it also follows that this commenter may be anticipating that a compliment from a female user to another female blogger can be interpreted in excess and read as a pick-up line. This response suggests that the commenter is contemplating gender possibilities in which she is read as the observer and as a desiring body, a position that has been theorized as being inhabited typically by white, male bodies (Chun; Kolko; Nakamura).

Such reactions reveal how Angeline's claims to both stable and instable identities can function to unhinge and reposition readers within her own community. Commenter Two's response to Angeline's post shows that more recognizable identities, albeit potentially interpreted as stereotypical, provide readers a way to address and negotiate transgressing identities that can, in turn, influence commenters to shift their own relationship to Angeline's sexuality in response to her blog. Such writing to and from the community affirms Angeline's belonging in her community and on her own terms as a pansexual Asian American. Although Angeline's address of the public as "you people"

("you people have been super annoying with your bisexuality posts") may seem to come across as less than welcoming, her orientation toward the public and even some people in the community (suggested by the "idiots that [Angeline] subscribe[s] to") also work simultaneously to call attention to and parse the public between the "idiots" against bisexuality and a public that may be more accepting and open to Angeline's sexual orientations.

Although preemptive, the constructed community and public opposition affords Angeline some sort of closure or resolution. In asking Angeline about these blogs, she says, "of course I never had that accusation [of being a liar about her sexualities] but it was more for peace of mind ^^ [emoticon for eyes]." Such construction addressing both the community and public, furthermore, opens up a site of discourse where Angeline's imagined addresses spur on real and productive engagements with members from both sites. These engagements, in turn, allow Angeline to secure her sexual identity as it changes and transforms within the span of this blog and among multiple ones. When I asked Angeline what she thought about these supportive comments to her blogs, she remarks, "it definitely made me more confident in my identity/ like it made me realize it was okay to be what i am" (Instant Messaging Interview 2/24/2011). The "confidence" that Commenter Two reads from Angeline's post underscores Angeline's effective textual performance. But it is through the acknowledging remarks from community and public audiences that Angeline actualizes her confidence in claiming her various sexual identities.

I did not come across any negative posts against Angeline's sexual identity claims, which may suggest there are not many readers from a hostile public and/or that

Angeline could have deleted any negative posts.[32] However, I did come across one comment from a stranger to Angeline's site. Commenter Three's response to Angeline's blog illustrates how he attempts to align with Angeline's views, thus distancing himself away from "you people" and the "idiots" Angeline constructs. Yet, this comment spurs on an interaction between the Commenter and Angeline regarding "choice" and sexuality and provides Angeline an opportunity to further clarify and assert her identities with both her community and public audiences. Commenter Three writes,

> Hey, Just passing by… Great you finish [sic] with your finals. Hope you can enjoy your time off… and my thinking is that any person is heterosexuals, homosexuals, bisexual, or other… That their choose [sic]. I feel people of the world is not open to new idea [sic].. Ok, hope you stop by.. later…

Commenter Three's address, "Hey, Just passing by" shows that Angeline's post does reach a public of strangers, albeit the responses from the public amount to much less than the community (two public responses). Similar to Commenter Two, Commenter Three also opens his response with a nod toward Angeline's finals. But, unlike the other commenter, Commenter Three directly addresses the blog's main content regarding sexual identities by attempting to align with Angeline's experience and perspective on this topic. Indeed, one can read his alignment as an invitation to Angeline by how the response ends with "Ok, hope you stop by.. later.." That is, Commenter Three goes through rhetorical moves in this response, resulting in a request to Angeline to continue this initial engagement. He begins with recognizing Angeline's student identity, aligns himself with her view on sexuality, and makes a move to further forge this connection with Angeline by positioning himself against the world, as evidenced by his sentence, "I

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[32] Unfortunately, I did not think to confirm this with Angeline during our interview.

feel people of the world is not open to new idea." This statement can be seen as a rhetorical move to mimic Angeline's own anger and opposition against the general "you people." In this way, Commenter Three signals to Angeline that he stands with her against the more narrow-minded world and public and, hence, this may compel her to accept his invitation to visit his page.

Commenter Three's attempt to align with Angeline does not work out as he may have intended. In fact, Angeline takes this opportunity to correct Commenter Three and clarify her identity to him and others. She replies, "er, i don't believe it is a conscious choice to 'CHOOSE' to be homosexual; imo [in my opinion] it's your environment and circumstance. i believe we're all pansexuals at birth; society, parents, etc. brainwash us to be whichever way. and then, whether or not we deny or accept it is the actual choice." Commenter Three goes on to agree with Angeline's clarification—"Choose is not the right word to use"—and thanks her for adding him to her list of subscribers. In this way, we see both Angeline's original blog and Commenter Three's response carving out a site in which Angeline can engage with a more complex and dynamic explanation of sexual identities. More so, this exchange between Angeline and users like Commenter Three reflects what Angeline tries to capture in the opening of her blog: a construction of opposition and affront, which provides her exigency to explore and defend her various sexual identities even if no one has really accused her of pretending to be a "lesbian" or writing such blogs to get attention (Instant Messaging Interview 2/24/2011).

As an Asian woman claiming multiple and transgressive sexual orientations, Angeline can be just as easily disempowered by her identity claims. That is, *looking at* Angeline may very well be accompanied by broader cultural narratives that can position

Angeline as an Asian fetish, thereby dismissing her many other selves that constitute her being. While scholars have theorized Asian Americans and sexual identities (Eng; Lee and Wong; Shimizu), there remains very little work examining the intersection of race, sexuality, religion, and new media. Angeline's previous experiences of growing up a sexually confused Asian-American woman in a highly religious and "traditional" household significantly inform how she constructs not only her sexual identities on Xanga, but her articulation of *being* in community and public imaginaries. Indeed, as Celine Parreñas Shimizu argues in her work on sexuality and race "… any Asian/American woman who must understand her identity and her possibilities must engage hypersexuality in representation. That is, sexuality imbricates them so that Asian women must always engage it as a force for understanding the self and their relations with others who project hypersexuality and the bind upon them" (16).

Yet such articulation and examination of self that embraces one's sexuality is not always possible for Asian Americans. In theorizing the role of sexual identities among Asian American and their families, Eric C. Wat posits:

> The implication that homosexuality is a Western phenomenon reaches deeper into the lives of many queer Asians. To occupy an identity that tradition has not allowed room for is, for many Asian parents, to reject the validity of that tradition and, by extension, of the family whose foundation rests on that very tradition itself. (76)

Angeline reflects Wat's understanding of many (not all) Asian families in their stance on what they consider as deviant sexualities. Her response to a comment criticizing her for representing all Christians as homophobic reveals Angeline's own experience within her ethnic *and* religious community. She rebuffs this comment: "from my own experience my family and my old church members have always been resolutely against it. Maybe

it's got to do with my Asian culture? Asians are pretty homophobic […] also my church(es) were against gay marriage as well." In this response, Angeline implicates her religion and race in homophobic beliefs which, in turn, also implicates her own position as potentially rejected if she were to "come out" to them—she has not from the last time I spoke to her/read her blogs. If, as Shimizu and Wat suggest, Angeline is read by the broader public as already hypersexual due to her race and if her sexual identities are unacceptable in her ethnic-religious community, Xanga may afford Angeline a place to claim not only her various sexual identities but also in ways significantly supported and celebrated by community and public audiences that may be limiting, demeaning, and alienating in her offline contexts. This is not to say that Angeline's assertions of sexual identities will be free of limiting fetishes, but these assertions are on Angeline's own terms; to view representations of sexual identities as a positive or negative ignores its abilities to open up and create new meanings about the textual and material body. In fact, Shimizu posits: "What I find is that while Asian/American women are not free from interpellation as sexualized and racialized subjects in representation, there are opportunities to redefine our sexuality every time" (14-5). For Angeline to claim multiple sexual identities among community and public audiences, afforded by Xanga's writing ecology, already redefines sexuality as an identity worth writing about and acknowledging— a sign of progress given the silence surrounding this topic among Asian Americans. Such claims allow Angeline to belong in ways that are not accessible to her in her offline contexts and suggest that Xanga is able to address Angeline's double-negation of her identity as Asian and American and how this racio-cultural complex is shot through with gender and sexual density.

What is most subversive and radical about Angeline's writing is not her claim to multiple sexualities, but her assertion that these sexualities are shifting and changing. In fact, readers experience a destabilizing rhetorical movement through Angeline's blog as she goes from declaring her bisexuality, to stating that, "it isn't clear-cut and often times I simply prefer to refer to myself as just queer or gay," to affirming that the label "pansexual' is "more accurate." Ultimately, Angeline's writing, orientated to both community and public audiences and flanked by more recognizable identities, allows her to find confidence and locality in the very uncertainty of her sexual identities. As Shimizu contends, "If the Asian/American woman cannot be *imaged* [sic] outside of sex, her self-formation must occur in terms of redefining sex" (my emphasis 20). Through rhetorical positionings that play with static and stable identities and through placing community and public imaginaries in tension, Angeline textually imagines and re-"images" her identities that allow her to *see* herself as Asian *and* American, and belonging.

Conclusion

Nick, Chris, and Angeline reflect how community and public function in relationship to static and stabilized identity constructions. Nick shows how identity construction in relation to a community is not a smooth process, but one that requires him to approximate his textual identity and production against community responses to his writing. This process of approximating is complicated by Nick's history as an adoptee from South Korea by white parents. Nick writes from a white, public identity position and such writing receives commentary from community members that help Nick discover an acceptable "register" for his writing and identity. I see Nick's writing emerging from

static identities that become unhinged as he moves toward stabilizing an identity that registers with community members. Chris also feels rejected by his community and public imaginaries offline, but departs from Nick in constructing a stable identity that successfully registers with the community. His assertion (and the community's acceptance) of his "average ninja" identity combines both his Asian and American identities, allowing him to bring together and celebrate two very important aspects of his being. Static and stable identities allow Angeline to toe the line in appearing typically hypersexualized or too radically progressive for both the community and public. In fact, she places community and public in tension through her various rhetorical moves that accuses and/or favors one over the other. Angeline's move to reinvent her sexual identities and gendered constructions alongside static notions of race, and among various currents of community and public tension, simultaneously accommodates and unhinges readers' expectations. Ultimately, such challenges can be read as demands on both the community and the public to broaden their understanding of Asian-American identities as inclusive of Angeline and what she represents. All three participants illustrate how community and public imaginaries function in the formation of racial identities. As the participants move from static positions to stable and more complex rhetorical constructions, I find them rewriting their relationships to the community-public so that they are belonging members in both sites. Being able to belong, through stable identities, to one or both of these sites is a critical step in writers' ability to critique and challenge these imaginaries because in belonging, these writers acquire agency for negotiating and representing "Asian American." I take up this topic in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

CHALLENGING ASIAN STEREOTYPES AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE

"If culture means those objects and events that nurture, shape, and sustain people, then popular culture must be those artifacts that are most actively involved in winning the favor of the public and thus in shaping the public in particular ways… The work of popular culture is therefore inherently rhetorical, and it is an arena in which rhetoric as the management of meaning must be most actively engaged." —Barry Brummett, *Rhetorical Dimensions of Popular Literature*

The negotiation of intercultural tensions to construct static-stable identity positions we saw in the last chapter seems to lead to gaining a voice that can be representative of the community and speak back to the public. In this chapter, I explore that move. *Stable* community identities afford writers the ability to contest popular media/culture and its representations of Asians and Asian Americans and, in the process, challenge the public imaginary to include more heterogeneous and complex Asian-American identities and experiences. In enacting a stable identity in opposition to pop media/culture, the relationships between community and public also change. When negotiating identity positions, community significantly supports and fosters members' emerging identities; it works to reaffirm writers' desire to create an Asian-American identity that is recognized and acknowledged by other members in both community and public ways. This critical step in constructing an Asian-American identity, though, does not remain in this formative phase. Rather, writers adopt a stable identity that shifts the community from an affirming enclave into a collective they come to represent. When writers feel a part of the community they also understand themselves as representative of the community, an understanding that, for many, leads to writing opposing popular and

stereotypical images (visual and textual) of Asians and Asian Americans. This *strong* and stable stance that writers take to represent their community also highlights how public functions differently at this particular instantiation of the writing ecology. Popular media/culture collapse with notions of the public, and writers treat the public not as just readers beyond their immediate community, but they also see the public implicated in popular media productions of problematic Asian-American identities circulating "out there" (Aaron).

What I mean by pop culture (I include pop media in this term) is the realm in which culture, through symbolic and rhetorical means, is being significantly created, consumed, and shared by the masses or what is perceived to be the public. Pop culture can take the form of movies, books, commercials, music, fashion, to name a few, in participants' writing. In fact, aggregate data show that pop culture was directly addressed as a trope a total of 50 times—almost as much as intercultural tensions (this does not include indirect inclusions of pop culture, which can be seen in almost all writing). Although it is typical among bloggers to comment on the shows they watch, the music the listen to, or currently trending styles, many writers on this site are incorporating pop culture to challenge widely circulating stereotypical representations (textual and visual) of Asians produced by popular media.[33] It may be obvious that users on this site include pop culture in their blogging on a regular basis, given that pop culture plays a large role in many if not all of our lives. But including pop culture is not always done for the aim

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[33] Kent Ono and Vincent Pham intentionally use "Asian" when theorizing media stereotypes of Asians and Asian Americans because "Asian," rather than "Asian American," emphasizes media's portrayal of all Asian and Asian-American people as typically foreign and/or outside of the mainstream rather than constitutive of it. I will also follow suit in using "Asian" to indicate pop media's conception of Asians and Asian Americans in stereotypical ways.

of constructing identity through cultural affiliations (filling in what movies or foods one likes) or to create a readership through similar interests (Williams). What has been less examined is how pop culture, and by extension the public, is challenged by writers on the grounds of Asian American-related issues and concerns (Mao and Young; Ono and Pham). In these uses, such inclusion of pop culture is complicated by how pop culture, itself, gets implicated in our collective understanding of the public.

Pop culture, although not synonymous with the public, functions to represent "the public" to the public. In other words, my research suggests that writers on this site come to understand the public, as inclusive of Asians in either a stereotypical manner or absent of Asian-American identities altogether, through their experiences with popular culture. Popular mediations of "public" representations, in turn, shape viewers'/consumers' perceptions of how various people and populations belong (or not) to the public. To be clear, I do not see pop culture and media as the same as the public, but I do see them connected in inextricable ways. It appears that participants also see the public connected to, if not the same as, popular culture because of how popular media exposes them to what they may perceive as public representations of Asians. In addition, participants talk about the public as representative of the people who are viewing and consuming these images of Asians. Although only a few participants articulate a direct connection between pop culture/media and the public, many participants (13 surveyed) indicate their understanding of pop culture as an important site of public representation.

For instance, MariaBoscardin writes in her survey: "A negative representation of Asian Americans is that TV show that is supposed to be based in Korea Town in Southern California. These individuals are not representative of the Asian American

community and because they are the few who will be immersed in mainstream media, they will inevitably serve as the Asian American representatives." MariaBoscardin intimates how characters of the television show, *Korea Town*, may potentially represent the whole of Asian Americans to viewers. It should be noted that at this point in the data collection a YouTube teaser of the show had been circulating on the Internet and on Xanga; there was online "buzz" around this potentially new show featuring Asian Americans in the same vein as MTV's hit reality show, *Jersey Shore*, based on Italian Americans and their everyday lives. MariaBoscardin's fear that a "few" will define the whole is not without cause; portraying such limiting images of Korean Americans as drunks and partiers (as indicated in the teaser) would indeed go against the stereotypical "nerdy" grain. However, the fear is not only the representation itself, but also how these representations will be taken up by mass viewers, particularly if *Jersey Shore* is any indication of the success in producing stereotypes for public consumption.[34] In other words, MariaBoscardin's belief that a few characters "immersed in mainstream media" will represent the Asian-American community suggests that she recognizes media's role in amplifying particular characters and characteristics to a public viewership.[35] Similarly, Aaron, another participant, implies mainstream media's role in the process of his own identification: "at home we are taught one way by our parents and relatives but outside and the main stream media [sic] show us something different […] at times almost contradictory to how we [are] supposed to identify ourselves." For Aaron, the

[34] This show gained national notoriety when one of the main female characters, Snookie, was punched in the face in a bar altercation in an early episode of the show. In fact, *Jersey Shore* is MTV's highest rated show to date (Gorman).
[35] Since participants use the term "mainstream media," I will use this interchangeably with pop culture and/or media.

mainstream media influences his identity formation, but he suggests that what is shown on television is confusing given its contradiction to his own experiences "at home." Such home experiences allow Aaron to see this difference, but for viewers who do not have such experience or exposure to Asians and Asian Americans, what pop culture "shows" may be the only sense and mis-knowledge viewers have about Asians and Asian Americans (Paek and Shah). Both MariaBoscardin and Aaron's concerns indicate the importance these participants place on "mainstream media" in its representational power to define them, as Asian Americans, to others in the viewing public and to themselves.

Peter Dahlgren sheds light on why mainstream media is implicated in the public and, consequently, why participants appear to be addressing the public in their challenges of pop media productions. In Dahlgren's work that historically and theoretically examines television's impact on the public sphere, he concedes that "consuming media in [individuals'] homes, do not comprise a public," but, "in terms of the 'space' in which 'public sphering' gets done, we can readily see that while the media constitute much of this space (as discursive, semiotic), the space of the public sphere is—and must be—larger than that of media representations" (18-9). Dahlgren argues for a relationship between media and the public, in which media comprises much of what we understand to be the public due to how traditional media (print, radio, television) has developed to mediate much of viewers' exposure to others, while preventing any true discourse between the representation and viewers. It is no wonder, then, that Alex connects pop media and the public: In asking him a general question with how he sees himself representing "Asian American" in his writing, Alex replies: "so… I guess I'm very

aware, aware of how, I guess, Asian-American's [sic] *are seen in the public*" (my emphasis).

> Me: How are they [Asian-Americans] seen? Can you describe that a little bit?
> Alex: So the first thing that pops up was in terms of filming. Films and stuff. We're still behind in a lot of things. We could still use more representation… of just Asian Americans… ahh… of just Asian people that are just normal.
> (In-person Interview 11/26/2011)

In asking Alex to describe Asian Americans in the public, he immediately points to "films" (as evidenced by "the first thing that pops up") to explain his "public" response. This conflation of the public with "films and stuff" reflects how participants and members on this site are imagining public as not just the broader readership beyond their community (chapter four), but also as popular media and culture. Alex goes on to name the successful television show, *Heroes*, as an example of a "film" that fails to portray an Asian man and white woman "kissing" even if they are romantically involved. As with MariaBoscardin and Aaron, Alex indicates that representations of Asian Americans in mainstream media matter to him because this informs how Asian Americans "are seen in the public."

The public was representative of whiteness for Nick in chapter four when he internalized whiteness as part of his identity formation. When imagining pop culture as the public, participants also externalize the public in its association and/or conflation with pop culture, allowing them and other visitors the opportunity to evaluate and speak back to the "people out there" (Coolmonkey) and who are typically treated by writers as a white public (Alex, Aaron, Chris, Coolmonkey, and Geoff). These inclusions can be popular icons and narratives imparting normative notions of whiteness (e.g. superheroes;

leading roles in American movies) and/or stereotypical images of Asians and Asian Americans. The awareness of this white public is indicated in survey data when participants responded to the question: "What do you consider negative and positive representations of Asian Americans?" Three participants pointed to "mainstream media" for their answers (Aaron, AJ, and MariaBoscardin); four participants used the term "media" (Chris, LcrazyaznL, Nick, and Sonlay); and six participants implied popular media/culture by referring to specific "TV shows" and/or "Hollywood" (Alex, AJ, Coolmonkey, Jose, Mark, and Matt).

AJ, a 21-year-old "Indian" (racially) "American" (ethnically) student, reflects this awareness when he explains how negative representations of Asians develop:

> I think in a good deal of our mainstream media, Asians are still somewhat typecasted and portrayed in a limiting way. A lot of Asian women are fetishized, shown as either subservient/submissive, nerdy, or only exclusively romantically associated with White/Caucasian males, whereas Asian men are desexualized, given side roles at best, made jokes of, and fulfill some negative stereotype… You hardly, if ever, see Asian men/women having a lead role of sorts in a film about American culture because in most media, they have to be seen as ethnic. The media does not show their ability to be just as American as anyone else. (survey)

AJ not only attributes these negative representations to "mainstream media," but goes on to suggest that "mainstream" representations of Asian people limit viewers' comprehensions of Asians and Asian Americans in stereotypical ways. For AJ, "seeing" or not seeing "Asian men/women" in particular roles results in how viewers also come to understand who and what constitutes American culture. To put it another way, AJ comprehends that what people come to know about American culture is due to what they perceive through "mainstream media." AJ's belief that the media portrays only the "ethnic" side of Asian people as opposed to their American-ness reveals how he views

“American” through a lens of whiteness, even as he critiques mainstream media. AJ does not see that ethnicity can and should play a role in constituting “American” and, instead, sets up a binary where media’s focus on characters’ “ethnicity” is in opposition to American. The stereotypes that he lists—“subservient/submissive,” “nerdy,” and “desexualized”—represent what is un-American in relation to an Asian body but becomes representative of the individual when tied to non-Asian bodies. That is, an Asian person who claims and signifies “nerd” is read as proof that somehow all Asians are naturally academic overachievers, rather than seen as an individualized inclination. AJ’s criticism that the media does not show Asian characters “just as American as anyone else” points to an important site of contestation over who should be represented in popular culture. Examining AJ’s stance on this matter also reveals how popular culture remains colonized not only by white bodies, but also by whiteness as an ideology that presents “American” as a desired but invisible standard that Asian and Asian-American viewers are made to believe can be achieved if only the media stops showing “stereotypical” Asian characters. Yet, addressing visual representations and stereotypical characteristics fails to consider how “American” as an identity is also limiting in how it defines who can be seen or known as American. AJ’s passage suggests that what’s at stake is not just how Asians and Asian Americans are being represented but, also, how “American,” as an identity granting access to the very public imaginary in which rights and representations are contested, is in itself a site of symbolic and cultural conflict.

Writing challenging popular and public identities and representations will be explored through three participants: Coolmonkey, Alexander, and Bryan. These participants provide a more comprehensive picture of the ways pop culture is “seen” and

addressed by the community of writers on Xanga, illustrating the different motivations that compel each participant to challenge pop culture. Coolmonkey's self-described "tongue-in-cheek" criticisms against visual media, particularly current TV shows and iconic figures like Superman, reflect his belief that online writing should have substance; he strongly believes that blogging ought to inform readers and he writes to achieve this aim. Alexander takes a different approach to popular media. Instead of directly challenging popular media and its productions, one of Alexander's blogging projects (co-written with Lily)[36] discursively colonizes the iconic doll bodies of Ken and Barbie in a digital rendering of a picture-book and with the goal of winning a Xanga contest. Shifting away from excluding (white) representations is Bryan's lengthy review of Amy Chua's book, *The Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*. Bryan's writing points to various layers of representation ("original" book, news outlets, and blogging) underscoring issues of power and representation; it brings to the forefront the question of who gets to represent whom in the struggle for cultural and symbolic dominance in the public sphere. While Coolmonkey speaks directly to the public, Alexander attempts to appropriate it, and Bryan takes us a step further by illustrating a part in the ecology where writing and identity formations move away from critiquing representations outside of the community to turning inwards toward the community. These three participants show how their particular blogging activities accomplish similar aims of challenging pop culture through a community-public configuration that positions the writers as representative of the Asian-American community and the externalized public as aligned with popular (white) culture.

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[36] I focus on Alexander because Alexander was able to provide interview data. Although Lily consented to the study, she did not proceed to the interviewing phase of this research.

Coolmonkey: "This is all I have to fight Fox News": Challenging Pop Culture and Public Identities[37]

In examining specific writing instances that challenge pop culture and, thus, the public, I turn to Coolmonkey and his data collection because he represents one of the most vocal, prolific, and condemnatory writers of pop culture's production in this community. Coolmonkey self-describes as an "Asian" racially and "Taiwanese/Chinese" ethnically. He notes that he is in his "20s" and works in real estate. Coolmonkey writes in a "tongue-in-cheek" style that tends to provoke a spectrum of responses from visitors (this is supported by Angeline and my own observations).[38] For example, his response to the survey question, "What motivates you to keep writing on Xanga?" is "Women and attention." While this may be true, he also expresses a more thoughtful and serious side in our interview where he laments the decline of socially- and politically-orientated blogs and the rise of more "personal" ones: "like what they ate, or what classes they're taking, or about their bf [boyfriend]."

> Coolmonkey: but as far as blogging about shoes, that's more of thinking aloud
> Coolmonkey: and not offering opinions
> Coolmonkey: you should broadcast your message
> Coolmonkey: like, inform people about the shoe
> Coolmonkey: what makes it so great?
> Coolmonkey: why should it matter?
> Coolmonkey: stuff like that
> Me: Maybe this is a better question to ask: what should be the work or effect of blogging to you?
> Coolmonkey: I like to try to inform people
> Coolmonkey: or at least get them to start thinking
> Coolmonkey: and maybe get a laugh or two out of them along the way

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[37] The first part of the title, "This is all I have to fight Fox News" is a quotation on the banner of Coolmonkey's homepage.

[38] In our interview, Angeline also notes that she reads Coolmonkey in a "tongue-in-cheek manner." She goes on to say that she knows him well enough to not take his writing too seriously or literally (Instant Messaging Interview, 02/24/11).

Coolmonkey: and to get girls
(Instant Messaging Interview 02/21/11)

Coolmonkey surely presents humor and a tongue-in-cheek style of writing even in our interview, but his belief that blogging should "inform people" is one that is consistently reflected in his own blogging activities. His blogging data suggest that he wants to be able to "broadcast" specific insights and arguments regarding race and pop media; these intersecting topics are addressed in about three-fourths of his activity. Coolmonkey, in short, directly and aggressively addresses pop culture in his writing in order to critique how Asians and Asian Americans are represented to the public, defining his Asian-American community in the process. In contrast to writers like Nick (chapter four), Coolmonkey's ethos within the community is established and accepted. He may receive criticism and opposition, but such comments are aimed at his topics. For example, one of Coolmonkey's blogs, "Asians Have Double Eyelids Too, You Morons" (01/23/0211), argues that Asians and Asian Americans who are getting double-lid surgery are not trying to ape white people. Instead, enough Asian people with double eyelids exist to create this standard as coming from within Asian cultures. Most commenters agree with Coolmonkey's argument, but some do challenge his writing: "Hm, it seems lately, you feel the need to defend Asians. Have these things been bothering you so much lately? :)" This comment questions Coolmonkey's repeated "defense" of Asians, but it does not challenge his ethos to represent the community as members do with Nick's blog "Why Do All Muslims Overreact?"

Coolmonkey's writing that represents the community is only possible due to his own stable identity within the community. In the blogs I examined, there is no back-and-forth between him and community members negotiating his identity. Instead, members

typically affirm Coolmonkey's writing. The difference between Coolmonkey and writers in the previous chapter is that Coolmonkey's identity construction does not seek the acceptance of readers. Instead, his writing represents the community through an us-versus-them rhetoric that positions the Asian-American community as insiders and the white public as outsiders.   With Coolmonkey, we can see that the stabilization of an individual identity *within the community* shifts to stabilize and *represent the community* when writers include and contest pop culture.

Such community representations and challenges against pop culture/public are reflected in Coolmonkey's blog titled "Superman is Not an American." In this blog, Coolmonkey criticizes "people" who are unhappy the new Superman movie may feature a British actor. This blog reveals how whiteness operates in pop media, but more so, it reveals how Coolmonkey sees representations of "American" being controlled by media *and* by a public that voices its discontent and anger at the idea of a British Superman. American, a label sometimes coded in citizenship rhetoric, is a common-denominator identity for access to the public sphere according to many scholars (Dalhgren; Young). It is this common-denominator that Coolmonkey questions below:

> There has been a slow boil of discontent over the death of the American action hero. So far, Batman has gone to a Brit, the green Lantern has gone to a Canadian, the new Spiderman is going to another Brit, […] And the biggest uproar seems to be over the casting of another Brit for the role of superman. There are people out there threatening to boycott the movie because they didn't pick a corn-fed red-white-and-blue American to represent the man in red-blue-and… gold. Well, I have only one thing to say to them: Fuck you. Fuck all of you. (02/05/11)

In this excerpt, Coolmonkey's forceful criticism against the "people out there" and their insistence on an "American" Superman is called into question when he goes on to state "Superman is a motherfucking alien too! His ass is from the planet Krypton, not

America." This declaration underscores the "people's" projection of an American identity on a comic character embodying "alien" on multiple levels. The anger that Coolmonkey expresses ("Fuck all of you") becomes more pointed when he goes on to highlight media's hypocrisy in re-presenting characters imported from other countries. He writes, "That's right, you clowns were probably the ones defending a White guy playing Goku[39] on the grounds that he's an alien, thus, not necessarily Asian. He's the Asian Superman, you idiots! He was created by a Japanese guy, marketed to Japanese kids, drawn like a [sic] over-exaggerated Japanese man, and has a Japanese name." At this point Coolmonkey concedes, in parallel terms, that Superman emerged from an American context. But his concluding remarks reveal the whitewashing and double-standards occurring in pop media and the public viewership: "But at least the new Superman is a White guy, despite being British. *Look at what you did to our Goku*. He went from this [image of an Asian, male cartoon character about to shoot something out of his glowing hands] To this: [photo of a reclining and mid-riff-baring Justin Chatwin, an American, white actor who played the role of Goku in the live-action version: *Dragonball Evolution*, 2002]"[40] (my emphasis).

Coolmonkey's decision to insert these images as contrasting statements is striking in how the cartoon image comes across as much more aggressive and threatening than the picture of Chatwin. In fact, Chatwin's exposed midriff and inviting, couch-reclining posture can be read through a gendered lens in which Coolmonkey may be feminizing

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[39] Goku is a popular Japanese character originating from the manga (Japanese comics), *Dragon Ball*. This character has international popular status—the story has become movies in multiple countries, including China and the United States.

[40] I did not include visuals for the images described in Coolmonkey's blog because I was not able to obtain copyright permission. Also, Coolmonkey posted these images without copyright permission.

Chatwin, and thereby questioning Chatwin's credibility for playing a masculine character. A rhetorical reading of the visual components subverts the association made with white men-as-masculine and Asian men-as-feminine. In fact, Coolmonkey seems to be placing this ideology on its head. Given Coolmonkey's other blog that takes on the gender-sexuality issues portrayed by popular movies, this reading is likely. In a blog entitled, "The Beginning of the End of Yellow Fever," Coolmonkey posts the following about Jackie Chan, an internationally known Chinese actor:

> Jackie Chan is one of Asia's biggest imports to cross over to Hollywood. But he never really carried a movie himself. Instead, he always had to be [paired] with another big personality, and so he was always more of a straight-laced sidekick. And even though he can kick all kinds of ass, he is not a threat to White people because he never kisses a girl, much less has sex with them. He's just bad-ass enough of a minority, with none of the risk! (08/15/2011)

In this passage, Coolmonkey shows his understanding of how Asian stars are imported into American films for stereotypical purposes. As sidekicks who are just "bad-ass enough," Hollywood is able to retain the cultural mystique and exoticism that martial artists provide movies and viewers. Additionally, this typecasting of the Asian man is also tied to issues of gender and sexuality through the absence (unspoken fear) of Asian men with white women. The "risk" that Coolmonkey points to is a risk of portraying Asian men on the same equal, masculine terms as white men. I see Coolmonkey as hyperaware of how Asians and Asian Americans are portrayed in media, particularly when Asian men are portrayed as sidekicks and feminized in comparison to the stronger, more "American" leads.

The critique of these media roles is even more complex when considering *who* Coolmonkey is addressing in his "Superman" blog. In the first section of this blog,

Coolmonkey both points to ("There are people out there") and directly addresses the people who are displeased with the potential of a "Brit superman" ("Fuck you. Fuck all of you.") Yet, in the second half of the blog, Coolmonkey writes, "Look what you did to our Goku" before the images of Goku and Chatwin. The morphing of "people out there" to "you clowns" to "you" in the previous Goku line implies varying conceptions of the public. The vague conception of the public as "people out there," framed and oriented in their belief that Superman should be played by an American, speaks to Coolmonkey's reflection in our interview: "hmm, public is very broad/ like, I can go to a train station and start yelling things/ that would be public." In similar fashion to the "people's" nationalistic bent, the riders at the train station were brought together in their need to use the train for transportation and are orientated in this need (Warner). Just as he imagines himself "yelling things" to a generalized public at a train station, Coolmonkey can be seen "yelling" at the "people out there" when he writes, "Fuck you" and "you idiots!" to the public orientated in their desire to see an "American" casted as Superman.

While the first few invocations of "people" and "you" establishes a general sense of the public orientated through a national identity, the last "you" in the Goku sentence ("Look what you did to our Goku") registers differently. In this line, Coolmonkey attributes the act of whitewashing Goku to "you." On one hand, Coolmonkey may be blaming the "American" public for their perceived power to influence character castings—their ability to inform pop cultural production. But on the other hand, this line can be read as a collapse of the public as viewers/consumers and the public as the entity in charge of character and movie production. This interpretation indicates that Coolmonkey's conception of the public is much more layered and complex than at first

glance or from the public conceptions highlighted in chapter four. The public, in this instance, is constituted by the combination of producers (as in pop media) and the consumers (as in audience), and supports how Alex sees the public as "films and stuff." Both Alex and Coolmonkey implicate and describe a public that has the power to represent *and* consume their image. How they see themselves fitting into this "public" loop can result in accepting some of the identity constructions made for them or in the identity stance that Coolmonkey makes through writing this blog.

The "our" in "Look what they did to our Goku" is also a significant inclusion on Coolmonkey's part. By claiming Goku as "our," Coolmonkey makes a clear distinction between "they" as the white public/pop media, and "our" as the Asian-American community represented by Goku. The first-person-plural, possessive pronoun signifies Coolmonkey's position as one that textually embodies the community, thereby representing the community's interests and agendas. In this case, Coolmonkey represents the community's affront over pop culture's use and transformation of Goku that visually excludes them and, I would argue, does symbolic violence to the Asian-American community when the message they are being sent by pop culture is that Asians and Asian Americans are not good enough to play a Japanese character (Ono and Pham). This distinction between "our" and "they" further underscores the oppositional repositioning of community and the public, a move afforded by the stability of a self-community identity. This repositioning also reveals writers' need to create a self, first, before they can go on to construct a self in opposition to Other. Paradoxically, one's identity only comes about through socialization, through the ways one interacts with others (Myerhoff). In chapter four, participants create themselves by imagining community as

Other while simultaneously subjecting themselves to the community ethos (Angeline). But as Coolmonkey shows in this chapter, conceptions and representations of oneself shift to include community while the public aligns with the position of Other. This constellation between self, community, and public configures the Other as white, allowing whiteness to be objectified and examined as external to the self. It inverts Ross Chambers' logic of whiteness in which the position of the Other is inhabited by people of color. According to Chambers, people in the position of whiteness are doing the objectifying and examining, but this position tends to be unseen and invisible particularly to people benefitting from this position. Coolmonkey illustrates how whiteness can be made to occupy the place of the Other through the confluence of a stable self-community identity and through the conflation of pop culture and the public.

With so little representation of Asian Americans in leading roles in movies and sitcoms, it is no wonder that Coolmonkey bristles at "people's" threat to boycott the new Superman on the grounds of national identity especially when pop media so easily e-races Asian-ness as a visual marker of identity (Kolko), even as it attempts to coopt Japanese culture and the story's success in cartoon form. At stake here is a public conception of "American" that aligns itself with a white and national identity while excluding what can be "seen" as American through alternative, raced bodies. Yet when media productions attempt to represent an Asian character and culture for broader public consumption, concerns regarding national origin seem to disappear for some "people."

Kent Ono and Vincent Pham's scholarship on Asians and Asian Americans and media representations help me analyze Coolmonkey's blog even further. In mapping out the role of yellowface in cinema's history, Ono and Pham argue,

> The wariness about real Asians and Asian Americans performing, coupled with the comfort in seeing white European Americans in yellowface suggests that audiences were more familiar and comfortable with stereotypes than with the actual people being portrayed. White European audiences wanted to see Orientalism without seeing Asian and Asian American people and their bodies. […] representations are thus very important to the way real Asians and Asian Americans were treated and regulated in US society. (50)

The whitewashing of Goku is particularly egregious to a younger generation of Asians and Asian Americans who grew up watching this in cartoon form, but were then disappointed to see Justin Chatwin get the role of a Japanese cartoon character. Such media constructions of "Asian" as antithetical to a leading role signal to all viewers that Asians and Asian Americans do not have a place in the symbolic or cultural ordering of pop culture. Understanding how racial representations are produced and circulating in pop culture becomes even more significant if we understand these representations as also public representations, as indicated by Coolmonkey. To put it another way, pop culture is not just a realm where trendy and cool cultural "objects" are produced, circulated, and consumed, it is also a site where the public or the image of the public is being created for consumers. It is a site where people understand how they belong in the cultural order. Through this lens, I read Coolmonkey's "Fuck you" as an angry reaction to being denied cultural representation.

It is clear that Coolmonkey does not accept such media representations implicating his racial identity. His blog challenges the whiteness of media and the public by highlighting their hypocrisy in contesting a British Superman, while re-producing a white "Asian superman" when it suits the perceived desires of a predominately white public. In taking a stance against this public imaginary, Coolmonkey is also representing his Asian-American community in a particular way. At the very end of his blog, he

suggests to this public: "So how about we do a trade. Since you used Justin Chatwin for Goku, we get to use Daniel Henney as Superman." Coolmonkey goes on to post two images: one of a cartoon Superman in flight followed by a picture of Henny in an unbuttoned white-collared shirt. He then asks, "Can you see the resemblance?" Henny is a half Korean and half Irish international actor.[41] Coolmonkey's suggestion to use Henny for Superman reflects his tongue-in-cheek humor and style of writing, but this rhetorical move that textually suggests a visual swap also argues for symbolic rights to the popular and public arena Superman comes to represent. By claiming Henny ("we get to use Daniel Henny"), Coolmonkey implies that Henny represents the "we," the community from which he speaks. In effect, Coolmonkey's writing works to represent his Asian-American community to the public through the body of Henny as a potential Superman. Introducing this possibility of an Asian Superman also functions to challenge notions of "American." If Superman represents one of the most beloved American cultural icons in comic and cinema history, then coolmonkey's suggestion to *re-see* this icon as visually Asian contests public and popular beliefs that "American" should be defined by white bodies or whiteness.

Community responses to this blog also support the reading that Coolmonkey is writing from a stable position (there are no supportive comments in the vein of chapter four) and that his representation of the community through Henny is approved by other members (13 out of 25 posts confirmed Henny should play Superman): "Ah. Mr. Henny. You can't go wrong with him. Enough said." (Commenter One). Other comments,

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[41] In his American roles, Henny may be best known for playing Agent Zero, in the movie *X-Men Origins: Wolverine* (2009). He plays a typical character for Asians and Asian Americans: he is one of the "bad guys" whose powers are used in service of a US Major gone rogue.

rather than being supportive of Coolmonkey's identity (there seems to be no need for such affirmation), are striking in how they address Superman as an alien: "Superman is also an 'illegal' Alien too, in terms of the laws and social stigma in America regarding Illegal Immigration, but somehow (not much of a surprise, if you come to think about it) Superman just gets a pass. ***Sigh***" (Commenter Two). This thread gets picked up a total of 6 more times by both Commenter Two and other commenters.

Instead of responding to Coolmonkey's personal identity, something that happens with participants who are seeking a more stable identity, Coolmonkey's move to critique Superman's origins as alien, literally, and alien to the United States provides other members the opportunity to relate to Superman on the level of immigration and citizenship: "It'd be interesting, how would the world he inhabits have reacted had he been of African, Asian, Arabic, or even Hispanic appearance? It'd also be interesting if DC Comics made a storyline about the Arizona law and how Superman would feel about it or how it affect him in some way" (Commenter Two).[42] Such musings about Superman as different racial identities and in a storyline where he responds to current political and social issues indicate how cultural icons can be, in themselves, sites of conflict and negotiation over issues of identity, race, and representation. Being coded as immigrant is an experience that many Asians and Asian Americans face (Chris, Nick). Hence, imagining one of the ultimate "American" icons attending to these issues of immigration as an "alien" himself works to re-imagine and re-image "American" in more inclusive

[42] Given the date of this blog (02/05/12), I assume that Commenter Two is referring to Arizona's attempts to pass more stringent laws on immigration aimed at the Hispanic population. The law is "Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act," introduced as Arizona Senate Bill 1070. It was signed into law two months later in April.

ways, both culturally (as belonging in the American imaginary) and visually (raced bodies). Coolmonkey's blog and ensuing comments validate and represent the Asian-American community, then, as American enough to be Superman or, conversely, Superman enough to be American. Ultimately, this text challenges the limited construction and representation of "American" as visibly and culturally white by portraying Asian Americans *as Americans*.

While commenters extended on this blog so that issues of race and immigration are folded into the larger conversation about Superman, it is Coolmonkey's writing that affords the space for subsequent critique. By suggesting that Superman can be played by an Asian-American actor, Coolmonkey claims a certain representation for his Asian-American community. That is, advocating for an Asian-American Superman is a claim made on behalf of Coolmonkey for Asian Americans, in which Coolmonkey also can be read as demanding to be part of pop culture and the public. Coolmonkey's ethos as a cultural critic is particularly salient on his homepage where he posts a pithy statement: "This is all I have to fight Fox News." What "This" means is rather ambiguous, but in returning to his interview and belief that blogs should inform readers, I interpret "This" as the blogging technology that Coolmonkey employs to challenge Fox News. This also supports the reading that Coolmonkey is hyperaware of pop culture/media's role in mediating information about the world, and further underscores his intention of challenging what Fox News represents: a misinformed media and public.

Issues of representation and race are underscored even further by a different user responding to Commenter Two: "Yea man, I bet the Kryptonians are pissed about this. Their race never gets equal representation in films" (Commenter Three). These re-

imaginings of "storylines" and "representation in films" is important because it makes alternative realities available as both a possibility and as a shared resource on this site (Myerhoff). That is, the visual and textual *re-imaging* of Superman taking on different races, addressing an openly hostile environment against immigrants, and representing a different (Kryptonian) "race" in film can be read as an invitation to other readers to critique immigration policy and the politics of representation. Therefore this re-imaging can be seen as a resource in how it gets taken up and circulated within the commentary section of this blog, and potentially beyond this blog. In fact, one commenter writes, "I've heard similar discussion in regards to this elsewhere" (Commenter Four). While it is difficult to know what this responder is referencing (Henny, Superman, Goku, or immigration) and where this "discussion" is being circulated, it is significant that this "discussion" is circulating as a recognizable topic.[43]

A raced and "alien" Superman can thus be employed to discuss and interrogate issues of immigration and representation among this online community. This also suggests that members are aware of how they are represented to others and the public, given their own insights into Superman. Specifically, Commenter Two reflects a complex understanding of representation similar to how Coolmonkey treats the public. His musing, "how would the world he inhabits have reacted had he been of African, Asian, Arabic, or even Hispanic appearance?" indicates his awareness that there will be some sort of response by the public to a raced Superman. He is wondering from an audience standpoint. But Commenter Three's follow-up sentence, "It'd also be interesting if DC Comics made a storyline," also shows his awareness that DC Comics

[43] I did not get this member's consent.

has the power to create alternative possibilities through not just storytelling, but the production of such. This shift to recognize DC Comics as the purveyor of stories, along with Coolmonkey and other participants' data, strongly indicate this community's self-awareness of how they are represented in/by the public as a collapse of both producers and consumers. While Coolmonkey does not directly create culture similar to the pop culture he critiques, his challenge against pop culture produces an important contribution to culture, even if it remains marginal. In this way, I see Coolmonkey inducing subculture paralleling pop culture through his ability to create discourse among community members. Coolmonkey's suggestion for an Asian-American Superman and Commenter Three's conception of a different storyline are already alternative cultural productions because of blogging technology.

Coolmonkey's representation of his Asian-American community surely challenges the public conception of American as white and nationalistic, but his representation also functions to exclude others within the community. In similar fashion to Angeline's static and stable rhetorical constructions that play into particular racial expectations while destabilizing sexualities, Coolmonkey employs a problematic masculine identity in order to contest racial representations. Masculinizing the Asian male body is an important racial project—it attempts to redistribute to other raced men the power invested in white male bodies. In representing the community through Superman's raced body, Coolmonkey reasserts masculinity and excludes members who may not affiliate with a masculine identity. Such writing that represents community and challenges pop culture and the public may be disruptive of established power and cultural relations but, by nature of representations, Coolmonkey's writing is also a selected

presentation/claim of Asian men. When Coolmonkey posits "our Goku," and suggests an Asian-American Superman, he speaks for a community and its desire as an Asian man. Such speaking excludes alternative voices within the community; it may be ignoring Asian women and various forms of femininity portrayed by Angeline or other alternative genders and sexualities. It is no coincidence that men tend to represent this community. Most of my participants are men because they were more likely to respond to my posts and were more likely to agree to this study. In order to acquire more women for this study, I had to place much more effort into responding to and fostering relationships with women. Although many of the women are less vocal relative to the men on this site, participants like Angeline and uttopia are willing to share their opinions and push against sexist rhetoric.

Alexander: The Adventures of ~~Barbie and Ken~~ Shillykins and FlipGuy31o: White Bodies, Asian-American Voices, and Reverse Occupation[44]

Coolmonkey intentionally challenges pop culture/the public and indirectly creates culture by providing other users the space to discuss broader political-cultural issues, but simultaneously representing one's community and contesting pop culture does not always manifest as a direct challenge. In fact, some writers enact more subtle forms of cultural opposition reflected by participants like Alexander who represent a different intersection of motives and identity positions. Despite the subtlety of his opposition, Alexander in fact produces cultural works in a more direct fashion than Coolmonkey. Instead of including pop culture as a springboard for the rest of his blog, Alexander co-opts white bodies and whiteness to meet his goal of winning a Xanga contest: "Mr. and Mrs.

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[44] Shillykins and FlipGuy31o are usernames for Lily and Alexander. These names are written below the intentionally crossed-out titles, Barbie and Ken, on the "cover" of the digital storybook. I have their permission to use both their usernames and real names.

Xanga." Along with Lily, another participant, Alexander textually embodies the iconic dolls Ken and Barbie in order to narrate their digital storybook.

Alexander is a 22-year-old male who states his ethnicity as "Filipino" and his race as "Human." He is currently a Program Supervisor for a company that assists mentally impaired adults on the West Coast. Alexander flirts with returning to school but family and work obligations prevents him from doing so. Among the participants in this chapter, Alexander exemplifies this community the best. He is well-known, well-cited, and often includes other members in his writing in order to tell a story, make a "shout-out" (public recognition) to other members, or to include them in his everyday musings. While Coolmonkey can be "controversial" according to his own words, Alexander rarely posts writing that is contentious. Instead, Alexander does not address pop culture as much as write about work and adventures with his friends. Writings and participants who reference him do so with a noticeable degree of warmth and camaraderie (Alex, Sonlay). In his project for the "Mr. and Mrs. Xanga" contest, Alexander directly employs community representations—he speaks for other members— and does so through white, doll bodies to construct a reflexive story about Xanga and its members.

As with most contests on this site, "Mr. and Mrs. Xanga" was initiated by a popular user on Xanga. This member called for Xangans to submit to this contest through multiple rounds of submission.[45] The first round asked contenders to provide readers personal information about themselves, such as how and why they joined Xanga. The second round invites contenders, in conjunction with another Xangan, to submit a

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[45] I did not ask for consent since I did not know I would be using Alexander's blog and, therefore, this member is not named. In fact, when I moved backwards to find the initial description for this contest, the member's profile and site was closed down.

creative story highlighting them as a Xanga duo; readers are invited to vote on stories they liked. Contests such as "Mr. and Mrs. Xanga" foster communal unity through friendly competition. According to Alexander, entering this contest expanded his own readership (In-person Interview 01/06/2011) and community because it exposed him to new readers while reaffirming his own status among community members. Alexander's submission for the second round is the blog I will examine in this section.

The blog that Alexander and Lily submitted to the contest can be described as a digital storybook employing an adventure plot. The gist of the plot involves Flip and Shilly (truncated forms of their names they use interchangeably) as fiancés planning a wedding. They are diverted from their wedding plans when Flip gets a phone call from Twitter headquarters notifying Flip that his friends are being held hostage and will be set free upon delivery of one million dollars. A scheme to save their friends ensues with inside jokes, personal references, and a clear sponsorship of Xanga over a different social network site, Twitter.[46] The participants combine visual and textual components to narrate their story. The visual component includes pictures of white dolls, particularly Ken and Barbie as visual replacements for Alexander and Lily:

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[46]Images one through three provide some context to this story.

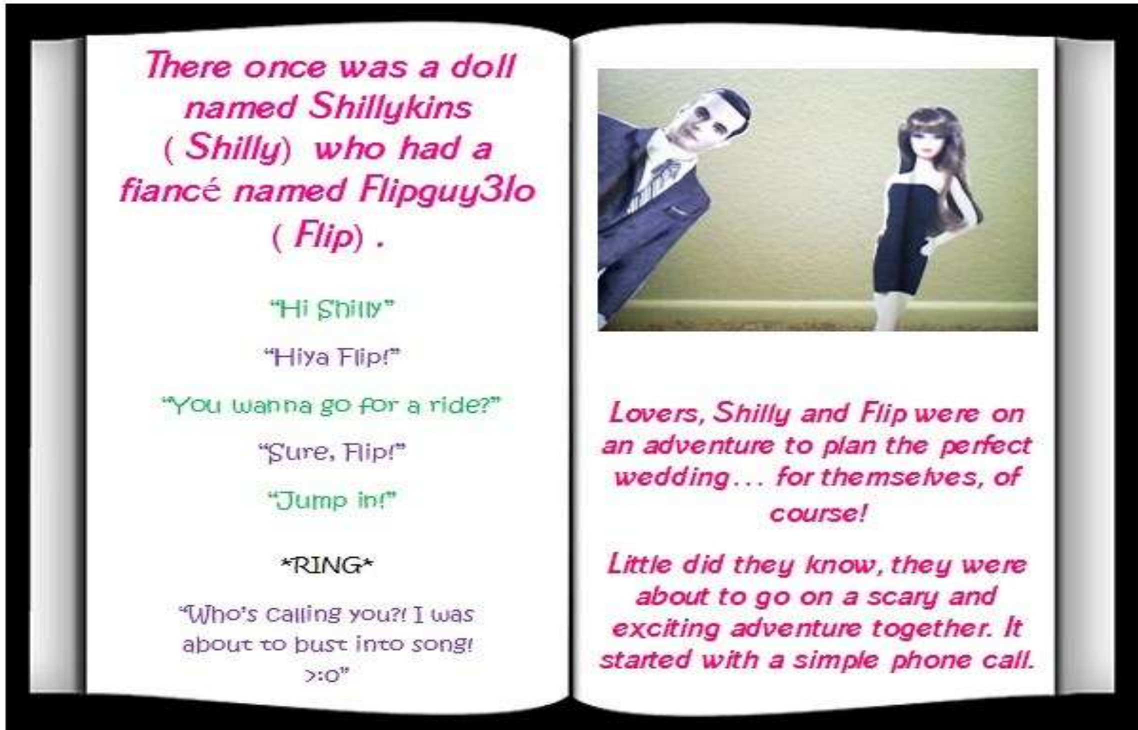

Image 5.1: "The Adventures 1"

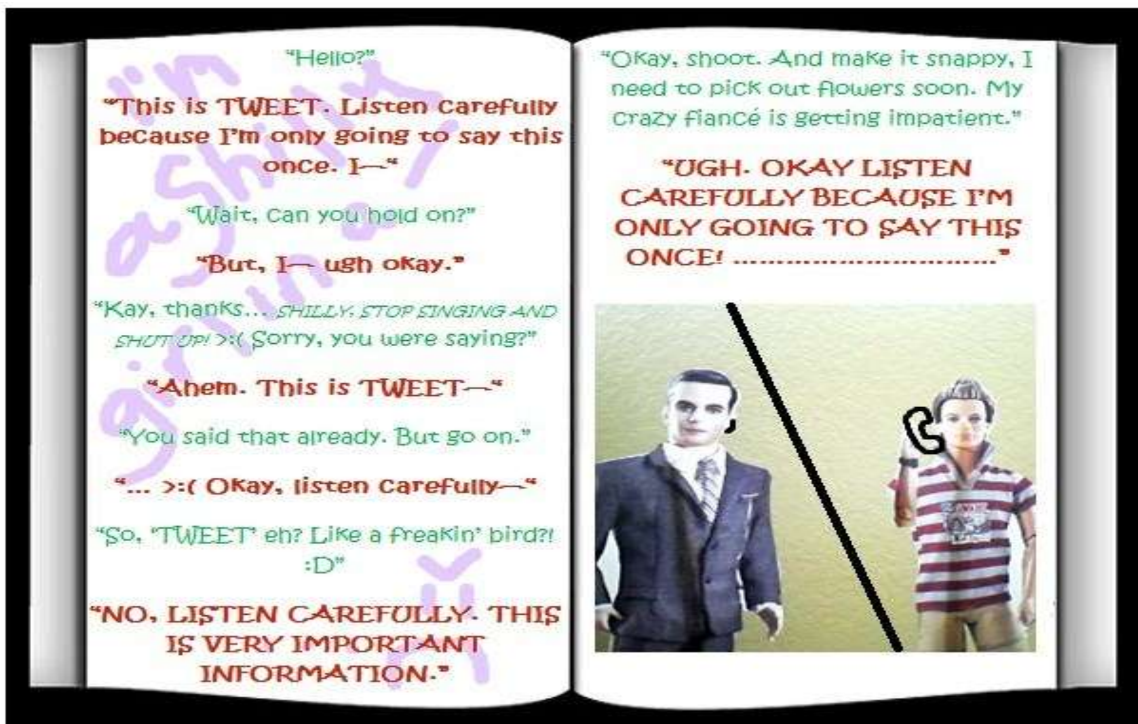

Image 5.2: "The Adventures 2"

As some of the most popular and coveted toys in history, Ken and Barbie are American cultural icons and hold a clear spot in the public imaginary. But they also represent the production and establishment of whiteness as a position and ideology in pop culture. This is highlighted in my interview when I asked Alexander[47] why he and Lily decided on Ken and Barbie dolls for the visual component of their story:

> Alexander: So, I don't know how we would be able to choose any Asian character for that competition when technically there weren't too many to choose from to begin with. […] That's actually interesting now that I think about it. Like, if there were, like, popular or famous Asian duos to choose from there's a good chance that we've might of chosen them, I guess. If we were aware of any or knew of any at the time. Yeah… possibly. (01/06/2011)

An Asian duo never occurred to Alexander because, according to him, there are none that come to mind. Even in writing to a predominately Asian and Asian-American audience, Alexander does not consider that these dolls are in visual contrast to his own and Lily's visible racial identities. Instead, Alexander and Lily went with cultural icons that are popular and easily recognizable to their readers. Alexander's revelation regarding the lack of a popular Asian duo not only reveals the absence of this relationship in pop culture, but it also illustrates how such absence functions to make even its own absence invisible, as evidenced by Alexander's disclosure that he did not think about this before I asked him in our interview. Such absence of Asian and Asian-American relationships serves to normalize whiteness and rationalize fetishes because different possibilities and realities, such as a popular Asian couple, are not produced and circulated in pop culture. Even if Alexander is aware of this absence, using Asian dolls does not make sense if Alexander is attempting to tap into the cultural influence and authority that

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[47] I was not able to interview Lily.

Ken and Barbie possess as cultural icons. Ken and Barbie inhabit a position of power in the public imaginary because they are easily recognizable and desired as toys; these doll bodies lend a certain degree of cultural capital to Alexander, Lily, and their story.

Although Alexander admits that he was not intentional in his choice of these iconic dolls—actually, he wanted to use Sesame Street characters, but they were already taken by another duo—examining how Alexander and Lily employ names in this story provides valuable insight into identity formation in relation to community and public imaginaries. In fact, the very opening of this story presents a textual move in which the title, "Barbie and Ken" are crossed out; below the crossed-out title are the names, "Shillykins and FlipGuy31o" in what appears to be graffiti-style writing:

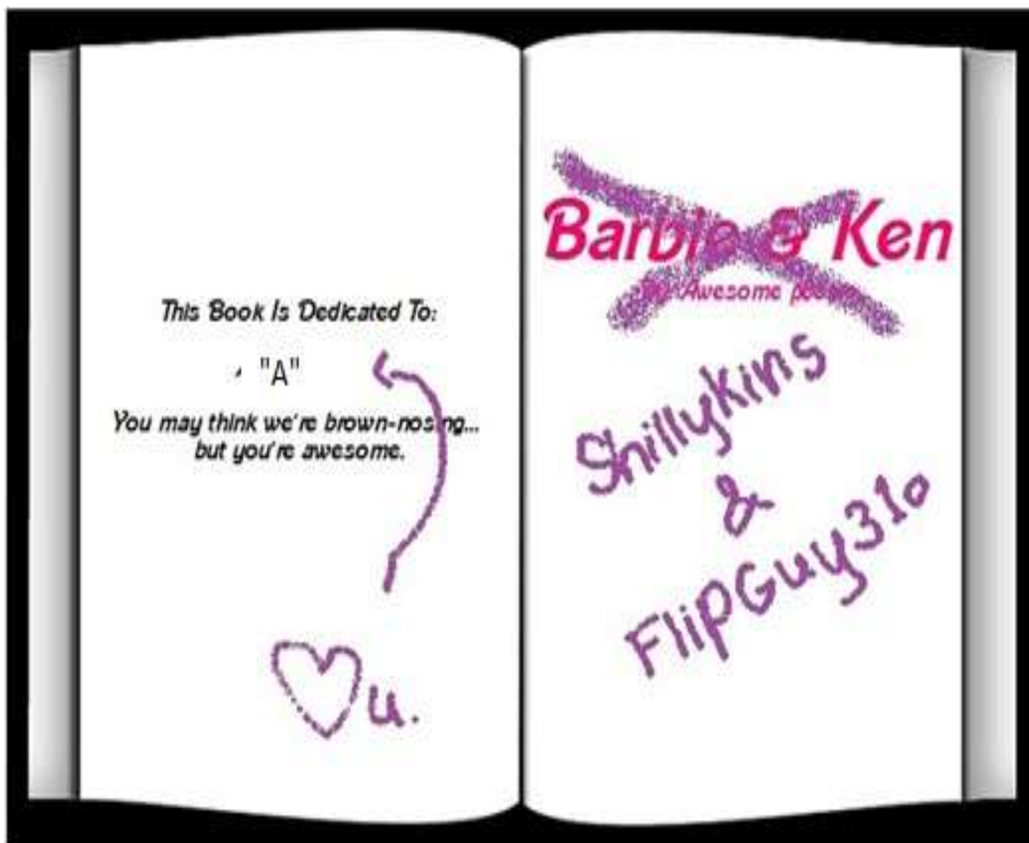

Image 5.3: "The Adventures 3"

Graffiti, as a subversive public art form, asserts a resistant presence in public space and consciousness. It defines the artist through the very act of making the artist's presence a known one, in relation to this public as alternative, criminal, and marginal (Lewisohn; Snyder). In reading the title page through this lens, I interpret the crossed-out title as an act of resistance and subversion, even if Alexander does not see anything overtly political or resistant about this blog or his writing in general (In-person Interview 01/06/2011). This act can also be read as an aggressive demand for public recognition. Renaming these dolls with their own profile names is similar to how graffiti artists paint on objects like buildings, bridges, and billboards as performative markings that claim the object while making their brand known to others. Indeed, the act of crossing out Ken and Barbie's name is not just a defacement and erasure of their identities as ideal, idolized (white) bodies, but the textual assertion of "Shillykins and FlipGuy310" functions to brand these doll bodies on both a symbolic and visual level.

That the crossed-out names are specifically "Barbie and Ken" makes this graffiti act even more significant. Alexander and Lily speak through these dolls, and therefore mimic whiteness (white face) in a manner that, intentionally or not, challenges whiteness—an act of reverse occupation and colonization. Pham and Ono argue that mimicry is a "strategy that appropriates the Other while simultaneously functioning to emphasize visually who has power in a relationship. Mimicry signals what is inappropriate in the Other through acts of mockery, which communicates the disavowal of the Other" (49; see also Bhabha). Although the authors are theorizing yellow face (white people's mimicry of Asian people), this theory can be helpful for understanding Alexander and Lily's cultural production when they turn such whiteness on itself by

textually defacing the names, Ken and Barbie, and possessing white, doll bodies in their storytelling. As Pham and Ono imply, such defacing and possessing signal a different power relation to whiteness: textual control over white bodies allows Alexander and Lily to be "seen" as white, cultural icons, but "read" as Asian American. It challenges whiteness and understandings of race by marking white bodies with a racialized "voice"—a textual reverse of yellowface.

It is also interesting that Alexander and Lily employ their profile names in this story but use real, offline names of the other Xanga characters in this story: one of the three members/characters is already a participant in this study—Alex—and the second and third character/member will be referred to as "D" and "S." The use of members' real names was not intentional on Alex or Lily's part. With that said, using the real names of members also reveals something about the relationship Alexander and Lily have to these members. By representing these characters through their real names, Alexander can be read as having a certain type of knowledge about these members that not everyone is privy to. He is, in effect, claiming a representation of these members who are themselves well-known on this site and signaling his own status in his ability to do so. For instance, the following images portray the members' characteristics or aims as weaknesses Twitter uses in attempts to shut down Xanga:

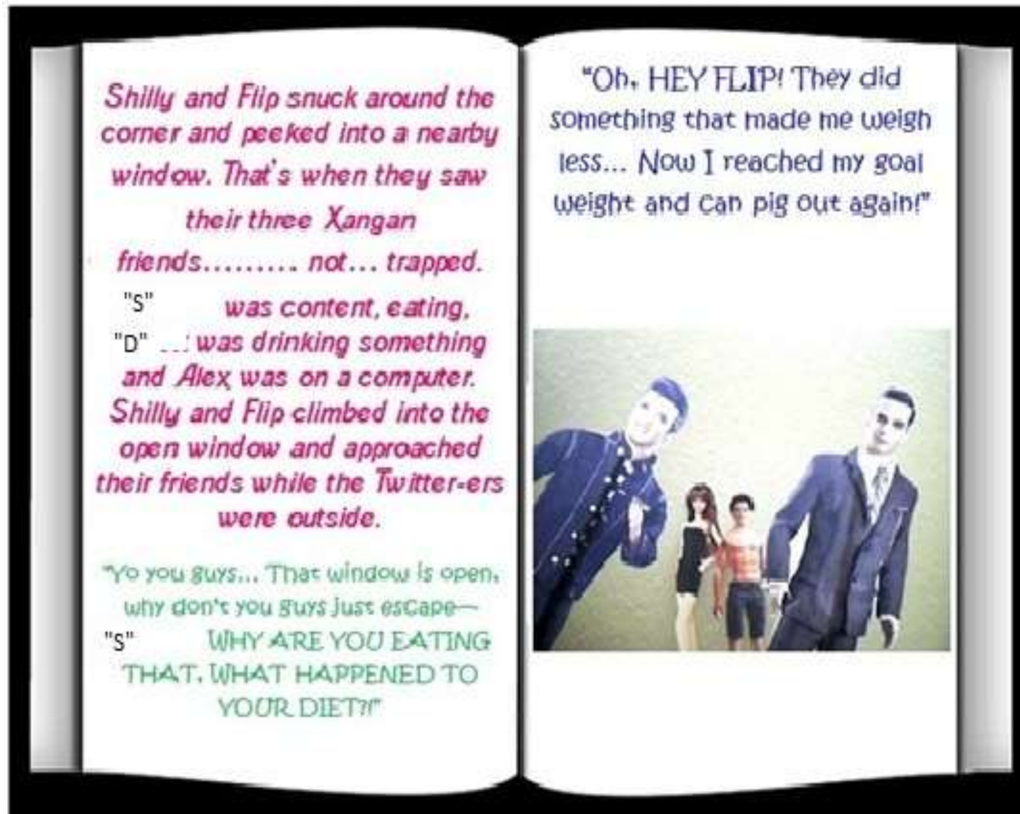

Image 5.4: "The Adventures 4"

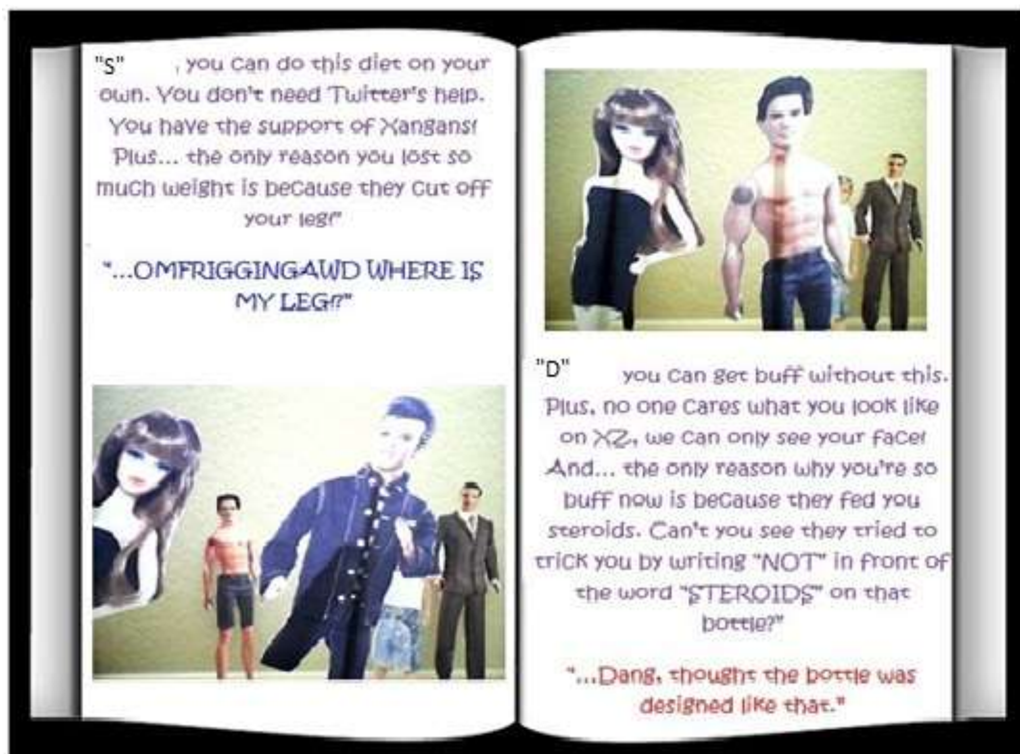

Image 5.5: "The Adventures 5"

Inclusions such as, "'S', why are you eating that, what happened to your diet?!" reflect personal knowledge of the member. "S" was, indeed, on a diet, and people who knew him well enough would understand this reference. In "saving" these characters, Flip and Shilly remind them of their strengths and the supportive nature of their Xanga community: "'S', you can do this diet on your own. You don't need Twitter's help. You have the support of Xangans!" By encouraging these characters to remain strong in their diet goals ("S"), not take steroids to buff up ("D"), or not to abandon Xanga for Twitter (Alex), Alexander and Lily break Twitter's spell over these characters and "they lived happily ever after":

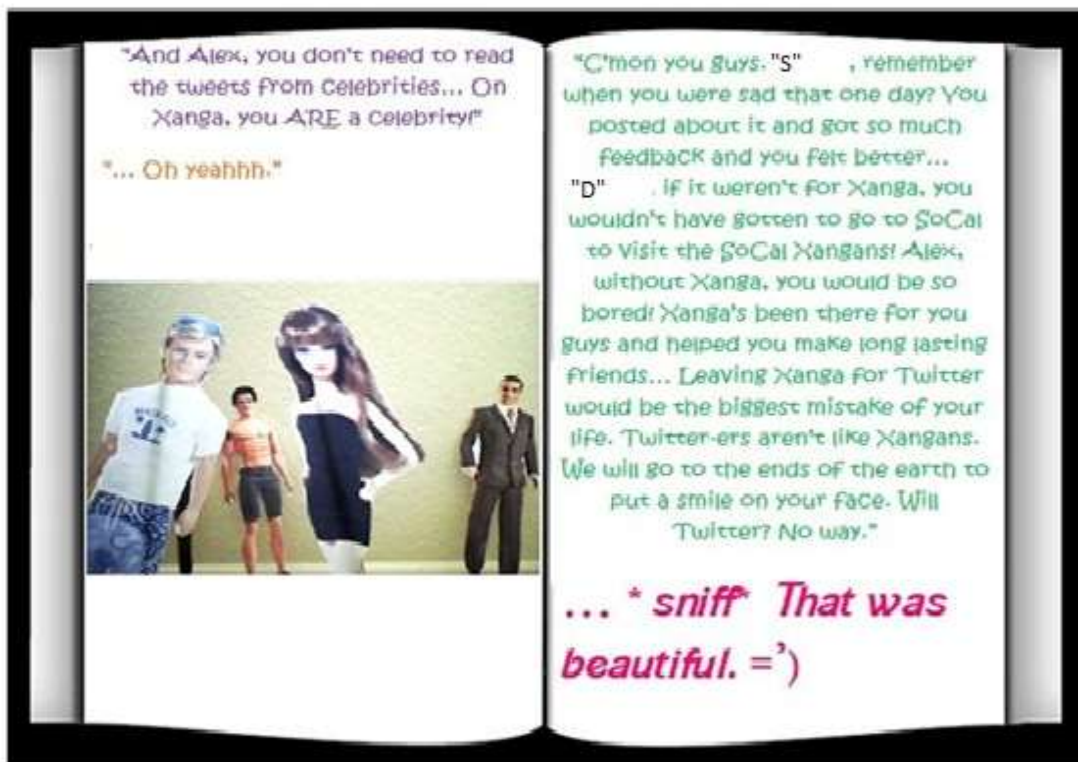

Image 5.6: "The Adventures 6"

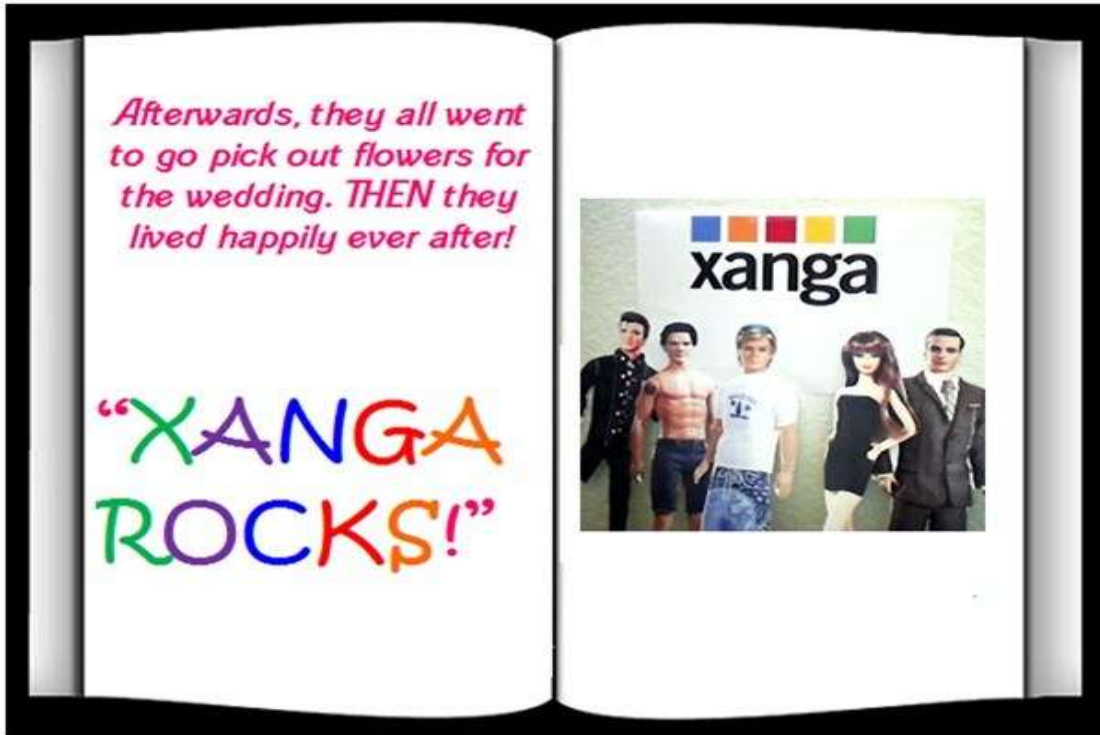

Image 5.7: "The Adventures 7"

The use of members' offline names in combination with real-life characteristics and issues underscores Alex's desire to represent his community realistically to some degree, even as he uses white, doll bodies in his visual representation of them. This racial disjuncture between the textual and the visual creates a challenging reading for both community and public readers. On one hand, community readers would know that all of the characters in this story are not visually white, but this story was still well-received by community members like Alex. In fact, there are no negative comments following this blog, only affirmative ones (there are 12 comments and 83 views). Alex, for example, writes, "yay! Good stuff! I like the revelations at the end." Others stated, "That was great!" or wrote something very similar. I read this reaction from the community in multiple ways. Perhaps no one questions the use of white dolls because readers may be oblivious to the visual representation of whiteness in this story. But

knowing that Alex is hyperaware of the lack of Asian and Asian-American representations in pop culture makes this reading less likely: "So the first thing that pops up was in terms of filming. Films and stuff. We're still behind in a lot of things. We could still use more representation… of just Asian Americans… ahh… of just Asian people that are just normal" (In-person Interview 11/26/2011). Hence, Alex's positive comment on the story may be indicating something different than his inability to "see" whiteness. The members' voices and identities may be overwriting the visual markers of whiteness in a way that makes it invisible, not as an unexamined standard (Chambers), but as one in which the bodies work in service of a textual identity. In this Asian-American community context, a discursive racial identity seems to colonize and overwrite whiteness, while co-opting the public position inhabited by cultural icons.

Whiteness, then, may be operating differently in this context than scholars have noted or theorized. It does not factor as the main focus of the writer's blog, as with Coolmonkey. In using Ken and Barbie dolls to tell their story, Alex and Lily reflect a shift in identity formation through challenging whiteness by subordinating it to the text; the text occupies these bodies, and the text also seems to be influencing readers and how they "see" these bodies as signifying Asian-American members. That Alex's data indicate his understanding of these doll bodies as stand-ins rather than an attempt at equal, representational correlations between racialized bodies strongly implies that the visual logic of race can be undermined by textual means. This textual work undermines whiteness by diminishing its power to represent the community to itself, as illustrated in Coolmonkey's section. In fact, the more salient identities are located in the very writing of this story. Readers can *see* these identities emerge through jokes, personal knowledge,

and encouragement that propel this story and puppet the dolls. Pop culture, in this case, gets used against itself. By possessing these doll bodies, Flip and Shilly speak through a public and cultural icon and act as mediums for Alexander and Lily's story. This cultural possession implies a resistant and oppositional claiming and assertion that amplifies the crossed-out graffiti-ed names of "Barbie and Ken."

As with Coolmonkey's self-community constructions that frame masculinity as it excludes other identities, Alexander's project simultaneously destabilizes race while reaffirming heteronormative subjectivities. The very contest title, "Mr. and Mrs. Xanga," invokes specific cultural positions for users to inhabit. Alexander mentioned a few male-male pairings, but none that I was able to observe directly. In the case of Alexander's blog, the use of Ken and Barbie dolls as visual representations of Mr. and Mrs. Xanga lends to the community sanctioning and normalization of heteronormative relationships. Again, such re-inscription of identities excludes users like Angeline who describes herself as pan-sexual. Contests such as "Mr. and Mrs. Xanga" are very popular on this site. They become widely circulated within and beyond the community due to the network of subscriptions and Xanga's own recursive marketing agenda that places these contests on the sign-in page, exposing such writing to the broadest-possible Xanga audience. The production of "Mr. and Mrs. Xanga" reveals how the community disciplines its own members by promoting particular identity positions. Members who want to engage and belong in the community are then asked to produce and consume this subjectivity, or what I would consider also as a static identity formation (see chapter four). In other words, members model this subjectivity in their own production of "Mr. and Mrs. Xanga" and readers sustain heteronormative ideologies and expectations when

they go on to provide supportive comments. I see this movement between production and audience/consumption similar to the very public that Coolmonkey critiques for wanting an American-born, white Superman. Instead of racial issues in the broader public, Alexander's case reveals how the community operates in the same fashion; the community generates static identities that are reified in its circulation among its community readers.

Bryan: "COMMENCE RAGE IN THE FORM OF A BULLETED LIST": Amy Chua as a Rhetorical Technology

With Coolmonkey we see a self-community representation orientated outwards, toward a pop culture and public that conceives of Superman as naturally white and American-born. By pointing out pop culture's hypocritical whitewashing of Goku and interrogating Superman's "alien" origins, Coolmonkey attempts to include Asian Americans in pop culture and public imaginaries through "Asianifying" Superman. This stable identity formation is different for Alexander who is not intentional in his challenges against pop culture, but subverts whiteness through iconic doll bodies nonetheless. His digital picture-book uses pop culture to *represent the community to itself* through a textual-visual arrangement that mixes Asian American as a textual production with American as a visual production, thereby inhabiting white, pop cultural positions with Asian-American "voices." Different from both Coolmonkey and Alexander is Bryan, a participant who brings together Coolmonkey's intentional challenges against pop culture/the public and Alexander's orientation toward the community. In this way, Bryan is writing from a mostly community-sanctioned, rhetorically-stable position in his opposition of the "Chinese parenting" method. But Bryan's assumption that community members have experienced "Chinese parenting"

suggests that his opposition against such parenting is not aimed just toward the public and how it conceives of Asians and Asian Americans; Bryan also constructs a sense of community opposition to contest the very experiences emerging from his own and community members' experiences growing up with a "Tiger Mom."

Bryan is a 19 year-old male student who identifies as "Asian" racially and "Taiwanese" ethnically. Bryan is not as well known in the community as Coolmonkey or Alexander. In fact, his blogs receive typically less views and comments than many of the participants. He represents a different part of the user/activity spectrum with his inclination to post songs as his mode of expression. He notes in our interview: "the embedded media [in blogs] can even function as something like an emotional shorthand" (Instant Messaging Interview 03/10/2011). My collection of Bryan's online artifacts reflects this kind of posting activity, which is also done by other participants like Chris and Matt. Although I did not pursue music as a mode of expression in this study, it is significant that one-fourth of the participants post music in their blogs or on their homepage, indicating that music plays an important role in how writers express themselves. In fact, almost all of the blogs I came across by Bryan had music attached to them or in the blog itself. That Bryan sees himself represented in these blogs is supported by his own reflection in our interview: "personally, i post embedded media to share something that i enjoy or something that is relevant to a post; sometimes the embedded media IS the post, and it represents something that i feel when i do not have the motivation to write." To read this another way, Bryan uses the form of music, as a production of pop culture, to express his feelings and identity.

Music is not the only medium that Bryan uses to express himself. Through a blog titled "My relationship with Mad Men," Bryan shows that pop culture, as music and television, is an important site of identity formation for him (10/31/2010). This blog offers an important context through which to understand Bryan. In this blog, Bryan writes about what he likes and doesn't like about *Mad Men*, a TV show set in the 1960s focusing on the office culture of an advertising agency. Bryan writes a lengthy consideration of *Mad Men* focusing on production choices and historically accurate details:

> The cinematography is brilliant! […] Watching the show feels a little like learning science from a lab experiment in that instead of merely reading about the battle between sexism and feminism and the changing tones of racism in America, I cansee [sic] the men behaving like rude perverts in the workplace […] and the women making numerous antisemitic [sic] comments in their gossiping. Oh, what a different world it was.

This blog illustrates how shows like *Mad Men* teach Bryan about America's history. In fact, Bryan states that the learning he does from watching this show is different than "merely reading" about "sexism and feminism." The "lab experiment" *shows* him something that books cannot, and he finds value in such learning. After an involved examination of this show, Bryan ends his blog with a paragraph about his father. The ending of this post shifts the blog's focus on *Mad Men* to Bryan's father and his life in the 1960s era and work culture:

> During the 1960s, my Dad moved to America after finishing his graduate studies in Taiwan and Japan. He lived and worked in the same America that *Mad Men* is portraying. He wore suits that were not unlike those worn by the ad men (he was vice pres of Comerica banks in my part of Texas) and used the outdated appliances of yesteryear. He behaved according to the manner and expectations of the time. […] When I watch *Mad Men*, I start wondering about Dad's past and I tell myself, this is how he lived. I wish I could have started watching this show back when he was still alive. I'm sure we would have enjoyed it together.

While lengthy, this passage reflects the motivation behind Bryan's attachment to the show. I did not ask Bryan about his father, but I can piece together from his blogs that his father passed away a few years ago. In this blog, we can see Bryan using pop culture for recalling and relating to his father. Instead of directly challenging pop culture in this blog, Bryan's writing and memory inserts his father, a Taiwanese man, into a work culture that is predominately white, sexist, and racist, as acknowledged by Bryan in the passage above: "the battle between sexism and feminism and the changing tones of racism in America." Yet, Bryan does not include any mention of how his father might have dealt with racial issues as a Taiwanese man working in such an environment. Instead, Bryan constructs his father similar to the male characters of *Mad Men* ("He lived and worked in the same America that *Mad Men* is portraying"), thus, representing his father on equal terms and occupying the very same white, public sphere that the show's male characters are inhabiting ("I start wondering about Dad's past and I tell myself, this is how he lived").

This blog is important for understanding Bryan's relationship not only to pop culture and the public, but also to his father. In fact, it is through pop culture that Bryan recalls his father in a particular fashion. Bryan remembers his father constituting the "same America" that the *Mad Men* characters are also shown to inhabit and create. Right after, Bryan posts an image of the male cast of *Mad Men*, a picture showing six white men in suits standing in an office. The juxtaposition between Bryan's textual recollection and this picture underscores how various narratives are working to inform his sense of the past and his relationship to his father, but these narratives also work to mis-inform each other. He praises the show for its historic accuracy and even goes as far as to say he

learned something about the culture from watching the show, but there is no mention of how the broader Asian-American collective "lived and worked" in this period. Instead, it is through recalling his father that readers get a sense of how one Asian-American is living and working in the same "America," yet Bryan does not address the "changing tones of racism" and the possible racial challenges that his father might have faced in such an environment. Such constructions of his father may be working to align him with what is perceived and now "watched" as "American culture" and, thus, Bryan may be Americanizing his father through a highly popular show that, in itself, also recalls and invokes a selective view of the past. *Mad Men* and Bryan both represent selective perspectives of American culture that are parallel (two racial realities) and oppositional (the show would not be able to accommodate an Asian man on equal footing with the current male cast). Bryan may have a different interpretation (I did not ask him to reflect on this particular blog), but I read the recall of his father's life as a challenge against *Mad Men's* portrayal of the 1960s American culture as constituted by white, male bodies. By textually placing his father among the characters pictured in *Mad Men*, a position of power typically occupied by white men, Bryan broadens readers' perspective of this era.

While this blog may not be highlighting Bryan's self-community identity constructions as clearly as Coolmonkey or Alexander's writing, I include it because it provides more evidence and insight into how Bryan constructs this imaginary for other topics. That is, Bryan reflects a hyperawareness of media and how it functions to include and exclude Asian bodies. A few months after the *Mad Men* blog, Bryan posted a blog titled "My Response to 'Why Chinese Mothers Are Superior,'" a lengthy, "wall of text," as one commentator describes it, criticizing Amy Chua and her childrearing methods—

media's main focus on Chua and her book. Community and the public may function as oppositional imaginaries for all of the participants in this chapter, but Bryan's blog addressing Amy Chua and her article[48] in the *Wall Street Journal* offers us a more complex understanding of how Bryan uses community and the public for identity formation. In his blog, Brian treats Chua as the very site of tension between Asian-American experiences and representations. Chua, in other words, is the literal and metaphorical *interface* where community experiences are represented to the public *and* back to the community —she acts as the screen and screens Asian-American experiences (Burke and Nakamura). Bryan's critique of Chua, then, is also a critique of how Chua-as-interface interprets Asian-American experiences to audiences (the community and the public) and, in turn, how viewers engage with such representations (pop culture's mediation and the public consumption of Asian images). Describing Chua as a *rhetorical technology*, then, is more fitting due to how pop culture (e.g the *Wall Street Journal*) and Bryan employ Chua as the interface for shaping particular understandings of Asian Americans.

One of the most significant differences between Bryan and a participant like Coolmonkey is that Coolmonkey questions only the pop cultural representation of Asian Americans (as sidekicks and feminized) whereas Bryan questions the very use of the "Chinese parenting" method for raising Asian and Asian-American children. That is, Bryan does not contest the existence of this experience; he depends on it to make his argument. For this very reason Bryan's writing lends itself to a more complicated reading and analysis because he is challenging not only what is interpreted on the screen,

[48] The article, "Why Chinese Mothers are Superior" is an excerpt from Chua's memoir *The Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother.*

but also the experiences generating the image. It took Chua's article in the *Wall Street Journal* (*WSJ*) to prompt such a response from Bryan, and for other participants (Chris). As a shared experience among many of the community members, this topic of the "Tiger Mom" and the "Chinese parenting" method is addressed in peripheral ways. It appears to me that writers' references to growing up with a tiger mother also assume this as a common experience among members (Aaron, Angeline, Chris, Coolmonkey, Sonlay, and utoppia). It was not until Chua's article and subsequent "public" controversy and attention that writers like Bryan reacted directly to this topic. It took pop culture's hegemonic depiction of Chua's book to a public audience for Bryan to articulate his stance against Chua. That is, how the *WSJ* excerpted and represented Chua's memoir is significant because it selectively portrays Chua arguing for the success of "Chinese parenting." Therefore, I argue that Chua could not become a rhetorical technology until she was mediated by pop culture and circulated in the public arena. The public reading of Chua allows Bryan to understand how others beyond the immediate community "see" Asian Americans, and it is this "public" viewing of Chua's article that allows Bryan to argue for a different Asian-American experience. Consequently, Bryan challenges pop media (the *WSJ*), the white (consuming) public, and the Asian-American community in his move to recast Asian-American experiences sans the "Chinese parenting" method.

This blog received over 1500 views and 24 comments. This is one of the most viewed posts I have come across but, oddly enough, the amount of comments seems rather scarce relative to visitors. While I have no clear support for why this is the case, I would argue that this is due to Bryan's position in the community. This particular blog may have been featured on Xanga's homepage, but Bryan does not appear as well-known

or popular among his community. I would describe Bryan as part of the community, but one who is not as established as someone like Coolmonkey or Alexander, members who can acquire easily 24 comments on any given blog.

When I asked Bryan how he feels about getting so many views, he states, "I am very happy that my thoughts made their way to a large audience, especially with such an important topic." I went on to ask Bryan to sum up his intentions for writing this blog. He goes on to say, "to clear up any misconceptions that [were] caused or encouraged by the excerpt of amy chua's book then dissect her reasoning and point out all of the flaws (there are many)." Indeed, this sense is reflected in his blog which opens with the following:

> On January 8th, 2011, an article titled "Why Chinese Mothers Are Superior" appeared on the Wall Street Journal website and entered the internet world. Written by Amy Chua, a professor at Yale Law School, the article expounds on the idea that there are two kinds of parents, the "Chinese" parenting method and (quite awfully) any other approach to parenting, and there is nothing that can beat a "Chinese" parent. Rock may crush scissors, and scissors may cut paper, but NOTHING beats a Chinese parent. Why the mess in the world would she write this (for the Wall Street Journal, no less)?! Because she can back it up, apparently. In short, she believes that her Chinese parenting method leads to more successful children.
> […]
> SCREW YOU, AMY CHUA. YOU IDEAS ARE TERRBLE AND THEY MAKE ME WANT TO RAGE.
> COMMENCE RAGE IN THE FORM OF A BULLETTED LIST.
> (original emphasis)

In this passage, Bryan shows an awareness of cultural controversies like Amy Chua's initial article (excerpted from her book), how they circulate among various media, and how specific media transform the representation and understanding of the circulating object. Bryan's question, "Why the mess in the world would she write this (for the Wall Street Journal, no less)?!" shows Bryan aligning Chua with the *WSJ* and popular media.

While this passage goes on to address Chua directly, ("SCREW YOU, AMY CHUA."), Bryan's interview indicates that he is criticizing Chua and the pop culture/public imaginary. In fact, Bryan calls out the *WSJ* for staging a "giant publicity stunt," attributing the initial article publication to *WSJ* and the subsequent pervasiveness of this article in the "internet world." In our interview Bryan describes this "marketing ploy" working in favor of the *WSJ*, but that "the readers of the WSJ got Kanye'd in a giant publicity stunt." Kanye West is a popular rapper known for making controversial statements and offensive public displays for attention. By using Kanye as a verb in this sentence, Bryan is suggesting that readers are also being duped into a stunt that is meant to create controversy for the sake of calling attention to this article and *WSJ*'s online site. Yet being "Kanye'd" also implicates the public for "watching" the stunt. Through reading/consuming this article, Bryan may be critiquing the public audience for their role in supporting the *WSJ* and ultimately Chua and her view of raising children. I interpret Bryan's use of Kanye as a critique against the *WSJ* for mediating and publishing Chua's article and the public for consuming such productions.

This awareness is different than Alexander and Coolmonkey's blogs because Bryan provides a more nuanced approach to representations produced on multiple levels: the *WSJ* and the internet (print-based entity and digital media and their selection from the book); Amy Chua's subsequent book; and how Bryan re-presents Chua in his own blog (digital challenges against pop and public representations). But if we bring to this awareness the insight that Bryan does not deny the "Tiger Mom" experience—he goes on to admit his own strict Asian upbringing—it is plausible that Bryan sees himself implicated by Chua in her article and, hence, consumed by a public audience. In short,

Bryan may be reacting not only to how he is represented by pop media, but how his experience is being made public by Chua and consumed by the public.

These layers of representation complicate readings of Bryan's blogs and notions of self, community, and the public, because Bryan not only criticizes pop media (*WSJ* and the Internet) for promoting Asian-American representations for self-gain, he also addresses Amy Chua as a singular entity ("SCREW YOU AMY CHUA") *and* the community, while simultaneously representing the community to itself as a unified front against Chua. For example, after the declaration, "**COMMENCE RAGE**," Bryan goes on to list what he sees as logical fallacies in Chua's argument for "Chinese parenting," consequently situating himself as the logical critic:

> It seems to me that Chua wouldn't be past waterboarding a young child in order to 'coerce' him/her to practice piano/violin since the pain and terror generated is only temporary, right? :D [big happy face]. […] she chalks it up to something along the lines of Confucian filial piety and parental sacrifice. **Perhaps if she dug a bit deeper, she would also find the Confucian writings on the <u>ethic of reciprocity and mutual respect</u> that goes HAND-IN-FRICKING-HAND with said filial piety.**
> Y'know, Amy, coercion isn't a reactant I'd use in a reaction to yield "mutual respect" and "positive reciprocity" (original emphasis)

This excerpt illustrates Bryan shifting between audiences, from using Chua to talk to the community to addressing Chua as both a public figure and a community representative. The first line that ends in a question, "right?" and an emoticon signaling a big happy face seems out of place for such a serious topic of, arguably, child abuse. There seems to be an odd juxtaposition of torture images and of a textual wink-nudge aimed toward readers, indicating coded intentions. In fact, I read this line as Bryan attempting to tap into the community's (assumed) "pain and terror" that is not so temporary, but lasting in their individual experience and made collective in Bryan's sarcastic proposal that "pain and

terror" is a transient phase of Asian and Asian-American childhoods. The following emoticon supports this reading of sarcasm, but it also suggests that Bryan is invoking "insider" knowledge in his rhetorical construction of audience and community. That is, the emoticon may be acting in place of a real facial cue, signaling that everything is alright but disguising the unseen "pain and terror" that Bryan and readers may be sharing.

While emoticons and Asian-American affect is not part of my study, I observed among many of the participants the characteristic of hiding how they feel from family and friends, offline, particularly when these feelings are related to something they consider personal or private. Chris, Angeline, and Aaron, for instance, do not feel comfortable sharing their feelings with their family not only because they believe that this would be met with conflict, but because this is how they were raised. This is something that I also experienced growing up; in my interview with Chris, we discussed our upbringings and families through this lens. Because Chris was so gracious in sharing his life with me, I wanted to share my own stories. In doing so, we bonded over similar experiences of learning to "swallow our emotions," a well-known phrase among many Asians and Asian-Americans. Being perceived as anything less than okay by the community and the public is partly why Chris' mother has trouble accepting his depression and his brother's sexual orientation as gay; she does not want others to know that her family is less than "successful" (Instant Messaging Interview 12/17/2010). While the public may read this emoticon as a smiley face, readers who have had similar experiences to Bryan will most likely read this as a specific reference to a learned performance of hiding one's emotions behind a façade of *looking* all right. The emoticon is the digital performance of an appropriate, public face. But for Bryan, the emoticon is

used ironically to point out the inappropriateness of disguising or denying the “pain and terror” Bryan and some of his readers faced as children.

The last line, “Y’know, Amy,” shifts Bryan’s address and construction of the community to Chua. With previous participants like Angeline and Coolmonkey, the address is orientated outwards toward a more general public, but Bryan’s address of Chua departs from the public imaginary as a generalized audience. Bryan does not see the public in quite the same way that Coolmonkey imagines the public commenting on Superman’s role or as reading his blog (as evidenced by his “Fuck you” statement). For Bryan, Chua embodies the very representation of the “Chinese parenting” method he finds so problematic and Chua becomes the focal point for his grievances. Bryan’s move from talking about Chua in third person to addressing Chua directly reflects how Chua functions as both an object of analysis and as a community representative against whom Bryan is arguing. Bryan’s bifurcated treatment of Chua underscores how Chua functions as the interface where community and public meet to construct and contest meaning: Chua is both a publicly-mediated object and a problematic community representative/representation for Bryan. But it is also through Chua that Bryan claims an alternative Asian-American experience. Using a “logical” approach, Bryan suggests that Chua did not interpret Confucius correctly and “if she dug a bit deeper,” she would find that there is a different way to read and apply Confucius for raising children. This alternative reading of a Chinese philosophy illustrates the formation of an Asian-American identity emerging through competing narratives at the level of community. Bryan argues for what ought to be an Asian-American experience.

As an Asian-American author writing about "Chinese" methods of childrearing, it makes sense that Bryan perceives Chua as a problematic representative of his Asian-American community. To be clear, Bryan does not deny the existence of this experience, represented in Chua's article, book, and in broader media sites. He is challenging the very method of "Chinese parenting" as an approach for raising children. In fact, Bryan admits that this was part of his own experience growing up and he even depends on this experience to construct the community:

> *Hitting is love, cursing is doting/fondness*.
> [That's] actually a Chinese saying that I was raised to. Being taught that physical violence and loud escalation of conflict are loving displays of well-adjusted solving behavior… I'm glad I learned better. This was seriously one of the rationalizations I was taught for being raised under a relatively "Chinese" roof. So yes, I was raised relatively "Chinese" and I turned out alright. Am I happy about it? Relatively, I'd say. (original emphasis)

Instead of contesting this representation, this section placed at the end of the blog describes Bryan's childhood as similar to the re-representation he pulls from Chua's article. Although Bryan claims that he ends up "relatively" okay, Bryan is also implying that not all children experiencing "Chinese parenting" methods turn out as relatively sound as he does; some children do not "turn out alright." But this self-against-Chua identity construction lends Bryan a credible ethos for what he does next:

> This one's for all the angry "Chinese"-raised kids out there. *We can be right sometimes, right?* Nah, probably not. I find tongue-in-cheek humor in the fact that Chua's article is an excellent example of the classic "Asian mom" distorted reality that we all talk so much about. Or maybe the other angry Asian bloggers are onto something with their first impression that it [Chua's article] may be a piece of Swiftian satire. (my emphasis)

Bryan's disclosure of his "Chinese" experience and identity affords him a platform to speak for and represent other "Chinese'-raised kids out there." By admitting that he is a

product of "Chinese parenting," Bryan has some foundation for claiming opposition against it. Read this way, perhaps Chua is also partly representative of Bryan's identity, supporting the reading that he sees himself mediated by pop culture and consumed by the public in ways beyond his control or consent. But we also see a definitive turn to the community. The first line, "This one's for," suggests that Bryan is writing this blog for the community members who remain affected by their childhood experience. In the second sentence, Bryan shifts to first-person plural and this provides multiple interpretations. By including himself among the "angry 'Chinese'-raised kids," Bryan may be contradicting his earlier passage where he claims that he "turned out relatively alright." His shared anger with others indicates otherwise. That Bryan directly asks himself and the collective Asian-American community if "*we* can be right sometimes, right?" illustrates the construction of a self-community identity as unified through their anger, resentment, and attempt to be right/alright (my emphasis). Indeed, it is also this combination of anger and resentment that works as a evidence that "Chinese parenting" does not result in "alright" kids. This inquiry constructs a complex ironic position that suggests other than what it asks. While the first part of this question, "we can be right sometimes," simultaneously unifies the community under the same aim in recognizing this as a shared experience and as a process of collective consolation, the last "right?" undercuts the sense of rightness by introducing doubt to the collective experiences for being "sometimes right," illustrating that the consequences of such upbringings are, in fact, still present in its manifestation of self- and collective-doubt. Not only does Bryan doubt, but he also doubts for the community.

Bryan receives commentary supporting his representation of his self-community constructions, thus indicating that people in the community agree with how he portrays their experiences and identities. In fact, most of the commenters go on to share their own stories mirroring Bryan's own childhood descriptions. One commenter writes, "My mother was so demanding with piano & was constantly disappointed with my grades, which would normally consist of only 1 B… Asian parents use guilt to make their children feel shitty" (Commenter One). Another commenter states, "This was a great post! My parents are from the Philippines and they were way too hard on us. Nothing was ever good enough, even though I was an honors student… They didn't even go to my college graduation, basically because my accomplishments did not impress them" (Commenter Two). These comments help to establish a particular image of Asian Americans that can be stereotypical in many ways, but these constructions homogenizing Asian-American childhoods allow writers like Bryan and fellow commenters to objectify and examine their own experiences as Asian Americans. Bryan, in effect, takes an object circulating in pop culture, and brings it into a community space that allows him and others to interrogate their own identities. It is only through this mediation and circulation that Bryan can treat this as a rhetorical technology for his own writing purposes. Chua and her article had to accrue a particular cultural resonance in its circulation through a white, pop culture/public arena where the contours of "Chinese parenting" as a topic and experience come into focus for Bryan. That is, Bryan views the public "reading" Asian Americans, and ultimately him.

Bryan's blog also departs from Coolmonkey and Alexander's cases in how commenters do challenge Bryan and his writing. That is, Bryan's fringe position within

the community may be providing a space where other members are more comfortable in contesting his writing. Commenter Three states, “I can say its [sic] quite arrogant to generalize the ‘chinese’ [sic] way of bringing up children. I know tons of other people who are not Asian who have been brought up in an environment very similar to the Chinese method. However, thanks for this article, since now i will use it in my multiculturalism term paper. :D.” By extending this experience beyond a culturally Chinese one, Commenter Three contests Bryan’s use of “Chinese” by separating race/culture from this childhood experience. Bryan retorts by pointing Commenter Three to the “original article”: “you would’ve seen that although she [Chua] calls it ‘Chinese’ because she is Chinese, she acknowledges that many parents of other cultures (Asian AND nonAsian) can and do parent their children in this way. That’s also why I decided to put Chinese in quotes in my response.” This clarification provides more insight into how Bryan constructs his self-community in the original blog. In his response to Commenter Three, Bryan reveals that he knows “Chinese parenting” is not solely a Chinese method. This revelation adds a new layer of meaning when Bryan writes, “This one’s for all the angry “Chinese”-raised kids out there.” Reading the blog and comments together indicates that Bryan employs “Chinese” to describe the method, rather than describing the method as emerging from a Chinese culture. This also suggests that Bryan’s use of “we” may be more inclusive of members than I initially read. That is, the experience of “Chinese parenting” is what unites/represents the community rather than an exclusively Chinese upbringing based on race and culture.

Bryan, in effect, declares that “Chinese parenting” is not limited to Chinese or even Asian people. By clarifying that he believes “Asian AND nonAsian” people also

engage in such parenting, Bryan contests understandings of what is Asian and non-Asian. That is, Bryan's acknowledgement mirrors what he did in his *Mad Men* blog; he challenges the space of whiteness by suggesting that this behavior or experience is not essentially "Asian"; but while "nonAsian" people experience this parenting, they do not get called out for it. That is, Bryan's use of quotation marks around Chinese calls attention to how this parenting method is racially marked. But other races do not get marked in the same ways; there is no "white" parenting method that gets labeled and mediated by pop culture. The absence of these labels for other races and the emphasis on "Chinese" indicates how this representation of Chinese people is acting as a racial stereotype. Read in this way, Bryan may be attempting to construct a community identity that is not based on race or ethnicity as much as on the shared experience of this upbringing. As commenters who present themselves as not Chinese, and as Filipina, Vietnamese, and even white, they are able to relate to this blog through their identification based on similar parenting experienced, thus challenging the Asian-American community in its broad affiliation with people who are not strictly "Asian American."

We see Bryan's construction of self-community unfolding as he goes from addressing Chua from his own, individual position to including the rest of the community in his opposition to Chua and the "Chinese parenting" method that hinges on experience rather than race and/or culture. Bryan represents a construction of a self-community identity that turns in toward the community to challenge "Chinese parenting" as constitutive of the Asian-American experience. While Chua may represent this negative experience for Bryan and community members, this controversy ignites because of pop

media (*WSJ*) and remains circulating and active due to various pop cultural sites, namely the Internet. The relationship between and construction of self-community and pop culture/the public is complex in Bryan's case, but it is for this very reason that I end with Bryan. This complexity affords more nuanced insights into how Bryan moves from challenging whiteness in the *Mad Men* post to challenging what ought to constitute the Asian-American experience. That is, the turn inwards may require more complexity than an orientation outwards when conflating pop culture and the public as an external projection with whiteness. Bryan's writing may suggest that a critical stance toward oneself and one's community requires more complicated positioning in the constellation of self, community, pop culture, and public.

Conclusion

In this chapter Coolmonkey, Alexander, and Bryan illustrate how the public and popular culture/media are treated as similar, collapsed conceptions. In examining their writing, I see participants reacting to what can be described as a power dynamic where pop culture produces and mediates representations of Asian bodies, but pop culture is implicated in the public because the public is the "audience" consuming such representations. How participants implicate whiteness in both pop culture and the public may be what aligns these two arenas for their writing. It seems to matter that participants can challenge representations produced by a white pop culture and a white, consuming public. While participants may not know to name it "production" and "consumption," they appear to be working between these conceptions when calling attention to the ways that Asian bodies are represented. Indeed, pop culture and the public are positions of whiteness that writers appear to be externalizing to their own and shared community

identity, and by treating pop representations as an object of examination. Coolmonkey and Bryan, in particular, are acting as critical consumers when they challenge pop mediated representations of Asians and Asian-Americans. Critical consumption is a form of cultural production due to how it produces counter-cultural meanings, but critical consumption of whiteness requires that these participants externalize whiteness as a position outside of themselves and their community. It is only through such externalization braced by community and public imaginaries that writers are able to see themselves in relation to and constituted by whiteness.

In challenging the production and consumption occurring in pop culture and the public imaginary, participants construct opposing identities that also represent the community. This identity move initially requires the community acknowledging a writer as a member—we see this with participants in chapter four. But once they are part of the community, the participants in this chapter "speak" for the community when they are critiquing pop culture/the public (Coolmonkey and Bryan) or when they are using pop culture to re-present their community (Alexander). Such moves shift participants' configuration with their community-public imaginaries so that they are oriented to and aligned with the community but writing to both community and public. Also, the degree of community or public changes for each of these participants: Coolmonkey writes to the public, Alexander writes to the community, and Bryan writes to both.

Yet members' attempts to represent the community are problematic because of how such representations exclude people within the community. Coolmonkey and Alexander's representations of an Asian Superman and a heteronormative relationship, respectively, can exclude users like Angeline who may not identify with these

community constructions. These (selective/selected) identities, while challenging and subversive to dominant constructions of race, reinscribe heteronormative roles. Representations of the Asian-American community can be, in themselves, sites of contestation. We start to see this happening with Bryan and how some commenters challenge his use of "Chinese" to represent a particular ethnicity as the community. Although Bryan addresses a topic mediated and circulated in pop culture/the public, his community orientation and re-presentation of Chua and the "Chinese parenting" method provides inroads for discussions on what constitutes "Asian American." Bryan gestures toward a self-community-public configuration where writers are interrogating the community identity. In the next chapter, I explore this shift and how writers treat the community as their public, instead of seeing the public as "out there." By using multimodal technologies beyond blogging (such as vlogging), participants see themselves as producers. This is significant because writers shift whiteness as the central referent by writing from their own Asian-American position. Chapter six, then, examines participants who have moved from a position of consumer, even if they are critical, to critical producers, therefore taking on the pop cultural/media position that they have been challenging in this chapter. Participants in chapter six are not constructing counter narratives but, rather, they are creating alternative Asian-American narratives belonging in both the community and public.

CHAPTER 6:

"I'M SOME FORM OF MEDIA": WRITING(S) FROM THE CENTER

Challenging pop culture and the public imaginary constitutes a good deal of the writing that happens on this site. Participants who have remained on Xanga long enough, write enough, and are accepted enough by the community move into a different identity position as a popular figure and voice within the community; their online productions are treated by members as central, generative content to the community. Rather than challenge pop culture, these participants write as *part* of pop culture, and thus, *public and community members orient themselves toward these writers as leaders*. Typically, participants in this position have been on Xanga for a significant amount of time (more than four years) and exhibit a high level of engagement; they tend to remain consistently engaged in their writing and commentary and are referenced by others in their online postings and even in multiple interviews for this study. Being acknowledged by the community as a leader offers these participants a particularly powerful position for directing and defining the community. As representatives of the community, these participants act as public figures and voices, creating and mediating collective experiences and beliefs for others. This dual position of being seen as a leader (public figure and voice) and a producer of culture (pop culture) shifts the participants' dynamic to both the community and public imaginaries once conceived of as places and audiences in which they seek to belong (chapter four), and imaginaries internalized and externalized, respectively (chapter five). As with participants in chapter five, participants in this chapter represent the community but such representations are created not in

opposition or (direct) reference to whiteness.[49] Rather, these participants write as if they *are* pop culture, narrating their experiences and lives in a way that forwards the convergence of Asian and American where these two identities and experiences are not in conflict. While chapter five explores public as both an audience to which participants write (public orientation) and as similar to pop culture due to pop cultures' representations (cultural object) of the public to the public, participants in this chapter take on pop culture as a position affording "public" representations. The position of pop culture/the public allows participants to represent Asian and American identities to the community and public by drawing on their own experiences, instead of using pop culture and representations determined by dominant agendas. These participants have accrued enough community status and value—they are known by the collective—so that community members treat these participants as a cultural object and mirror; they/their writings circulate like cultural objects, similar to Amy Chua's article, but they also function as a reflection of identities and experiences, cultural mirrors, against which community members compare and contrast themselves, and through which public members measure and understand the community.

This chapter explores what happens when writers are not pushing against pop culture and a public colonized by whiteness: they produce writing and identity constituted more by a combination of Asian *and* American. Writers in this ecological "locale" tend to pull from their knowledge of community norms and beliefs to compose their writing. This is not to say that issues, topics, and identities emerging from the

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[49] While participants in this chapter do not directly invoke whiteness in the ways that pervious participants have done, I still see whiteness as a pervasive and informing aspect of race. Writing that does not directly invoke whiteness is still influenced by whiteness as a cultural ideology.

community are isolated from the broader cultural context. In fact, issues that start "out there" may become significant community concerns. We saw this with Bryan's blog criticizing Chua; Chua's representations of Asian Americans may be seen by the community as emerging from the community, but how Chua's article and book gets mediated and circulated in the popular and public arena for an imagined white audience informs how meaning around these cultural "objects" is made. Therefore, I see a distinct difference between writers producing identities in opposition to pop culture/the public and writers who are more concerned with drawing on their own experiences to illustrate Asian-American experiences and identities. If chapter five can be described as an oppositional and co-constructive relationship between "Asian" and "American" where American is externalized by participants as a pop cultural/public site/representation of whiteness, then this chapter can be defined by participants' occupation of both Asian *and* American, resulting in writing that shifts away from whiteness as the center to one that incorporates Asian-American identity as a core aspect of identity formation. This sort of writing functions to support and mediate the community rather than to seek its authors' own support and belonging.

Contrasting participants like Coolmonkey and utoppia, for instance, underscores the difference between writers responding to a white center (Coolmonkey) and writers portraying Asian and American from a leadership role. Coolmonkey's declaration on his homepage, "This is all I have to fight Fox News," sets up an us-versus-them binary necessary to his identity construction. While readers may agree that Fox News is a problematic media conglomerate, without Fox News there is no need for "this," the Coolmonkey as we, the readers, know him. Coolmonkey's ethos is contingent on

fighting Fox News and the production and circulation of Asian and Asian-American identities "out there," and his writing does, indeed, do just that. To be pointed, Coolmonkey's representations of himself and his community—his identity configurations—are dependent on his oppositional construction of a white pop culture and public. Instead of externalizing the public position and identity, participants like utoppia inhabit/internalize this role. utoppia does not reveal her age and describes herself as "Asian" both ethnically and racially in her survey. Her interview provided me initial insights into what this leadership position means in the community:

> me: How do you think other Asians on this site "read" your writing. In that, do you think that you are contributing to their perspective on what Asians are? […]
> utoppia: most people find my writing entertaining. Maybe it's because it's something they don't dare write for fear of being judged or labeled.
> utoppia: some guys have messaged me asking for relationship advices
> utoppia: I kid you not on that one. Some girls have written to me about how they can lose weight and feel better about themselves
> utoppia: I felt like a dear something column for a while
> me: I didn't know that.
> utoppia: yup. Also, the interesting part was, a while back I got nominated for being the wisest xangan…
> (Online Instant Messaging 02/24/2011)

By distinguishing herself from this group caring about "being judged," utoppia indicates her awareness of how public and community readers are orientated toward her as a leader. Rather than seeking to belong, as Nick attempts to do in chapter four, utoppia highlights her role in helping other members on the site by providing them advice as a "dear something column."

Such advice-giving is very similar to a "Dear Abby" column. As a common inclusion in print news media, "Dear Abby" brings both individual inquiries and "Abby's" advice into the public sphere, therefore representing what can be considered

"common concerns" to the public (Habermas) and constructions of "appropriate" responses and actions to such concerns. We can understand "Dear Abby" columns, then, as culturally disciplining tools, selecting "concerns" from the broader public and representing them back to the public—it sanctions what counts as publishable issues. As I have been arguing, pop cultural representations typically exclude Asian Americans, subjecting them to a consumer position of identities and experiences—everyday narratives—that may not reflect who they are or their own lives. utoppia's understanding of herself on the same level as "Dear Abby" presents a different relationship and orientation to the public and the community because she comes to embody "Dear Abby." That is, utoppia is seen by the community as a public voice, representing "public" concerns and issues to both community and public audiences.

utoppia's comparison of herself to this news print genre and being voted the "wisest xangan" suggest not only her own awareness of her position, but also members' collective recognition of her influential position within the community and within the broader public; her writing is featured on Xanga's homepage through her association with a popular blogring, "Datingish."[50] utoppia's position as a public voice for the community and public imaginary is particularly relevant for how race is produced and circulated on this site because her public ethos evidenced by being "dear something" and the "wisest xangan" lends her writing substantial weight for influencing others. Through her posts and interactions with others, utoppia provides alternative ways of seeing and being Asian American that are not in conflict with American pop culture. In regards to how she believes her "Asian-American experience influences [her] writing" utoppia includes, "it

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[50] "Datingish" is a blogring about relationships and dating issues.

helps me understand different points of view. When I write, I try to keep in mind who my audiences are so I'll detail certain things that may or may not be known to them." Our ongoing conversation supports a reading of utoppia not only as enacting a public voice, but in a way that uses her own position as Asian and American to address both Asian, Asian-American, and white audiences, insider and outsider knowledge, and thus public and community imaginaries. That is, her "Asian-American" identity and perspectives afford her the ability to acquire multiple audiences, making her more "readable" to both community and public audiences. In our interview, I referenced a blog about her family's way of celebrating Thanksgiving in which utoppia writes, "I never grew up celebrating Thanksgiving the way Americans did, until after college [...] Heck, I never even had a Turkey until age 22. That year everything changed... I was still having family get together[s] with my own family which consisted of a seafood feast with a chicken" (Blog 11/24/10). When I asked utoppia to reflect on this blog and her combination of cultural approaches to food, she states,

> utoppia: most Asians could relate and added to my non-turkey dinner for turkey day [as in suggestions for what else to add to a "seafood feast"]. However, for Caucasians, they never thought it was weird but found it interesting
> me: Interesting in what ways?
> utoppia: learning the difference of culture I guess. No one ever mentioned it was weird. they did ask why about the no turkey and I explained to them that Asian people thought it was dry
> me: HAHAHAHA... that's what my family says too
> utoppia: and turkey was not a popular dish. Sort of like why most Asians are lactose intolerant because dairy is not part of our diet
> utoppia: you grow up eating what you know

Instead of seeing knowledge and representations being produced "out there" and by "Caucasians," utoppia inverts this relationship and creates an occasion for representing and explaining "Asian" to a (white) public, but she also provides a "balanced" way of

bringing Asian and American together for her Asian-American community and for potential public readers.

uttopia's reflection supports my own interpretation of her as presenting Asian *and* American life as a balanced experience:

> me: Do you ever feel in that taking on American traditions, outlooks, habits was ever in conflict with how you grew up in an Asian context?
> utoppia: not at all.
> utoppia: When I was younger, it did only because I wanted what my friends got to do. Having sweet sixteen parties and sleep overs and going to the mall
> utoppia: so that caused a lot of problems between me and my mom who didn't understand the western traditions.
> utoppia: but as I got older, I realized that there's a balance to adopting cultures. It doesn't have to be so extreme. In turn, I opened up my mom's eyes and she's much more understanding with my nephews about bake sales and fairs at school, halloween, birthday parties, etc...
> me: Would you say that this is reflected in your writing?
> me: The balance that is
> utoppia: yes. I still mention how growing up or being raised by my strict mom has made me rebel but also made me value how I turned out (02/24/2011)

Not many participants could or would claim that their Asian and American identities and values are copacetic, as indicated by utoppia's response, "not at all." Although utoppia portrays her Asian and American cultures as "balanced," she presents this through a narrative grounded in process and development, starting with the intergenerational tensions addressed by the majority of participants and ending in how she is able to transform her mother's perspective of American culture. In sharing this give-and-take with her mother on Xanga, utoppia portrays her ability to (and the possibility to) combine Asian and American positions as a process requiring negotiation between Asian and American: "It doesn't have to be so extreme." Such development can even influence people entrenched in both Asian and American positions within the very ethnic enclave

that has been so alienating for many of the participants in this study. In highlighting this process, utoppia shows that the act of narrating her negotiation between and eventual convergence of Asian *and* American is a racial project transforming how others can approach race, both on- and offline.

In this chapter I turn to three participants to illustrate their leadership role—encompassing pop cultural and public characteristics—and its relationship to community and public. I start with Alex because he depicts one of the most established "voices of the community," representing a position with the power to affirm and define community norms. His popularity within the community and broader Xanga context provides him a "public" platform/voice directed to both community and public audiences. For participants like Alex, his popularity allows him the power to represent and circulate Asian-American identities and experiences to both community and the public, representations that are too often produced by dominant and corporate interests. Similar to Alex and his pop culture/public position is Sonlay, but Sonlay differs from Alex in how he uses his position to challenge entrenched community beliefs and representations regarding Asian-American gender and sexuality. As Sonlay illustrates, his leadership position affords him distance from the community because he does not seek their approval or attention. In finding himself as more than just "Asian," Sonlay develops beyond the desire for acceptance and popularity, and this distance from the community allows him to contest community norms, while remaining an important member of the community. I end with Raquel and her slippery performances of identity challenging race and what constitutes Asian American for community and public members. Raquel demonstrates a more radical position because she perceives herself as "being media."

Understanding herself as a representational technology, rather than represented, affords her opportunities to engage race as intentional slippages of cultural performances, unhinging racial identities from a biological model. The combination of her images and texts cause readers to re-see race as an unfamiliar aspect of self and collectives, thereby framing race as a process and an object of analysis, rather than a biological or cultural given. These participants engage with blogs as process-narratives modeling challenging and alternative ways of being Asian and American.

Alex: the Community's Public Voice

Alex is perhaps the best example for modeling a "balance" between Asian and American identities throughout his writing. His desire to normalize Asian American as an everyday lived experience within the spectrum of American life is articulated across his breadth of data portraying one of the most amicable and supportive members on Xanga. Alex is a 24-year-old student and community tennis representative for the United States Tennis Association. He self-identifies ethnically as "Chinese" and racially as "Asian." Given Alex's "Xangalebrity" status and his label as the "Nicest Xanga," I am not surprised that he was the first person to welcome me when I subscribed to "Asian Diaspora" and for being an initial guide through Xanga and the community.[51] Other participant data support Alex's status: he was mentioned by participants in four separate interviews as someone I should examine for my study, as an example of a "well-known" Xangan, or as a user foundational to Xanga's "tight-knit" community. His initiative to organize meets, to lead collective online projects such as contests, and to act as, for lack of a better word, the community's historian has resulted in many of his blogs receiving

[51] See chapter two for details on Alex's role in guiding me through Xanga.

thousands of visitors and hundreds of comments. In this way, Alex is atypical, but he is seen by other members as one of the main representatives and leaders in their community. In fact, there is a running joke among members that Alex should be paid by Xanga because he promotes it so well. Alex's own sense of his racial identity and role on this site is ostensibly dubious, but Alex illustrates a leadership identity and position that is much more subtle in its relationship to race than many other community members. Alex does not mark Asian as different or Other or place it in tension with American/white. In this way, he normalizes Asian and American by offering his own narrative as indicative of an identity that may have formed in self/Other relations but has moved beyond such binaries to combine the self and Other within a new identity. Alex did not, that is, begin commenting on Xanga from such a position. Rather, he illustrates well the process that other participants, like those described in chapter four, go through to see themselves as an accepted member of an Asian-American community, and then he uses his position to move beyond previous participants to a space where he becomes a public voice of the community and to the community.

In fact, Alex points to identity formations and issues highlighted in chapters four and five. In response to the survey question, "What were your reasons for joining ["Asian Diaspora"] (#14), Alex writes, "The description fits me, being a Chinese American that have [sic] struggled with identity issues in the past." He goes on to state: "Being a part of two cultures can be a major issue that one thinks about a lot as they grow up." These responses are very similar to the ones made by participants in chapter four, and yet Alex's online data does not depict the cultural struggles between home and public or between Asian and American in the ways that previous participants do. This fits with

his claim that identity is an issue he struggled with "in the past." His affiliation with "Asian Diaspora," then, is something that served him during this phase of struggle, but his current writing reflects a different identity construction similar to utoppia's leadership position.

That Alex places his ethnic identity in tension with American results in a more layered reading of his identity: he ethnically identifies as Chinese and racially affiliates with an Asian collective. But Alex's identification with "Asian Diaspora" results in an identity struggle related to the "American" aspect of his identity, challenging notions of race as an inherent and natural aspect of people and groups. It is this shared racial experience of struggling between one's particular ethnic and "American" identity that constitutes Asian American, showing how shared experience of cultural conflict is Alex's current concern informing and defining his Asian-American identity. Yet his struggles emerge from his Chinese side as much as from the American side of his identity. Alex points to language as a site in which ethnic and American tensions have been problematic for him: "we have more experience with English and that kinda clashes with the notion that we should know Chinese […] I'm Chinese, I also like to know that I'm also American, so… being here I actually would speak more English than Cantonese, but I do try to,…I do try to work on it. I wouldn't mind knowing more of Cantonese." While Alex admits to the tension surrounding others' (family) expectations in his ability to speak Cantonese, he doesn't dismiss it on the grounds that he is American. Alex, instead, claims both—"I'm Chinese […] I'm also American"—and admits that he would like to learn more Cantonese. As with participants in chapter four, English marks Alex as more

American than Chinese to his family, but his awareness of this issue prompts him to "work on it," rather than place Asian and American at odds.

Alex questions both sides of the binary in a way that seems to let him eventually forge an identity within the tension (as a collaboration) rather than on one side or the other of it. Alex normalizes Asian American as a collaborative construction by not marking Asian as different or Other or placing it in conflict with American/white. In this way, Alex's leadership position is significant in how it allows him to speak as both a member of the community and one who sees himself as a member of larger "American" publics. I see this outlook informing his writing in which Alex uses ethnic particularities that may not be shared by other Asian Americans, but he believes it is the "struggle" or "issue" that is relatable, modeling for members a self that is able to maintain ethnic, Asian, and American identities and experiences:

> You can easily, like, say that [language issues] for a lot of different cultures. Like you could, like I could be, I don't know… like, I could be, Hispanic, and I could say, "yeah, okay, I'm here and I should know more Spanish, and I don't because I'm in this process… and that you can relate to anything, but in my particular situation is Chinese, and a lot of Asian-Americans [have] that same issue with their family… (original emphasis)

In this passage, Alex calls out Asian Americans as having "the same issue" he experiences with language, but he also imagines himself as a "Hispanic" person and having to deal with the same language tensions. Alex employs ethnic particularities to convey shared experiences among Asian Americans and across different racial groups. It is not so much the particularities as the "process" Alex underscores as the relatable aspect of his identity, highlighting shared experiences over particularities as the unifying characteristic in racial formation and collectives for his multiple and various readers.

This "process" of balancing Chinese, Asian, and American identities is reflected in his writing portraying his development on Xanga. In his blog titled, "Turning Her Into Literature," Alex explores the meaning of this phrase he heard from the movie, *(500) Days of Summer*, a romance drama. In referring to the title, he asks, "Does that make sense to you? […] I pondered this for a while until it finally became obvious. When all things are said and done, this is the underlying fuel that pushes me to write." Alex moves on to explain it was actually a Korean movie *My Sassy Girl* that "inspired [him] to put more of his thoughts down:

> The movie was based on a true story about a man who had posted a series of love letters on his blog, which later turned into a book. The main guy character does something similar as well while waiting for his girl to return. I figured it worked out for them, why not me? So, I began to jot down my adventures and misadventures hoping it would help heal some of my ailments. […] Writing my experiences down and reading what others have to say, I began seeing my problems from a different, less biased perspective. (In-person Interview 01/20/2010)

This blog received over 3,300 views and over 100 comments. Alex's emphasis on the "process" as the relatable aspect of his writing is practiced in this blog in which he portrays his own reasons for writing, but relating his process also models for others his ability to combine Chinese and Asian-American cultures and identities. By drawing from Korean and American movies as a Chinese-American, Alex constructs ethnicity and race as a cultural "process" that can be taken up by an individual, and not inherent in his ethnicity, Asian-ness, or American-ness. How this blog brings together multiple cultures and identities to inform Alex' story is distinct from writers like Coolmonkey.

By starting with a popular American movie and a direct inquiry to his audience, "Does that make sense to you?" Alex generates interest through establishing a potential cultural connection with the movie and an invitation for readers to make "sense," make

meaning with the movie's line. While *(500) Days of Summer* establishes his introduction, readers learn that it was a Korean movie, and not an American movie that influenced Alex's writing origins. By including an American movie and a Korean movie, Alex may be doing something similar to utoppia when she claims, "I try to keep in mind who my audiences are so I'll detail certain things that may or may not be known to them." The indication that Alex does include details for an audience, specifically, an American audience is in his use of the descriptive "Korean movie" and the lack of "American" to describe *(500) Days of Summer*. The given of "American" signifies a commonality among "American" readers that does not require articulating.

Marking the other movie as "Korean" can be seen as an issue of whiteness, but Alex's move to claim the significance of this movie in inspiring him to write does not place this at odds with the American aspect of his blog. Instead, Alex appears to be combining both cultural productions as a way to identify with both. This becomes more complex when considering that Alex's ethnicity is "Chinese," but he references a Korean movie. Alex's identification with these various sites of racial and ethnic differences presents identity formation as cultural affiliations rather than a biological given. Or rather, Alex draws from both a Korean and an American movie in informing his narrative of *becoming* a writer on Xanga, and results in readers commenting on both movies, providing two different access points for readers to engage with Alex and his blog. This may suggest that Alex culturally identifies with American more than Korean, but he does not frame this as a binary. For instance, some writers praised *(500) Days of Summer* as a good movie, while others were able to affirm *My Sassy Girl* as a something worth watching in responses such as "MY SASSY GIRL!! one of my favorite korean movies of

all time" and "I whole-heartedly agree." (Commenter One; Commenter Two). In short, Alex constructs writing that affords readers the opportunity to celebrate one or both cultures through readers' identification with American, Korean, or both movies. But, his process-narrative makes it possible for others who do not affiliate with these movies or cultures (or in addition) to understand and identify with *becoming* a writer, rather than strictly with an ethnic and/or racial identity.

In addition to his "past" cultural/ethnic/racial struggle and similar to participants in chapter five, Alex is aware of stereotypical images of Asians circulating in pop culture. In our interview, he states, "Like, I do read about… okay, there's this website called angryasianman.com. He talks about Asian-American issues, so I guess I'm very aware, aware of how, I guess, Asian-Americans are seen in the public" as "geisha[s] and super nerds" (survey). Given his emphasis on his awareness ("I'm very aware"), one may expect this awareness to translate into writing similar to Coolmonkey's blogs. Yet, his writing rarely presents cultural or racial conflicts. Although Alex does not directly call attention to these struggles and conflicts, he sees his writing as generated from an Asian-American perspective. In asking him to reflect on this ("how do you include notions of Asian-American experiences into Xanga?"), Alex answers,

> …the interesting thing about blogs is that you kinda write, if you write by yourself, and people come by and read it and they just ahh… the, the moment that they are reading your post, *it is just like they are seeing the world through our eyes for that time*. So yeah, that definitely helps people, umm, understand [the Asian-American experience] more by reading it." (In-person interview 11/26/2010)

Alex narrates an Asian-American experience not just when he writes about race or ethnicity, in the rare instances that he does, but *every time* he writes because readers are able to view "the world through [his] eyes" when they read his posts. Alex, then, reflects

an understanding of race as a constitutive "dimension of human representation" (Omi and Winant 55). In this way, Alex normalizes Asian American for his readers in writing about his life as an Asian American. By understanding that his frame is raced, Alex may not feel the need to call attention to the racial disparity characteristic of popular media because his point of reference has shifted from race as a stereotypical image informed by dominant interests to race as an aspect of his world. To put it another way, Alex points to Asian-American as the frame from which he writes, thus, challenging the invisible whiteness as the only grounds from which to produce racial identity through marked and cultural differences.

This shift away from whiteness and toward an Asian-American perspective is further supported in Alex's data positing his intention to normalize his Asian and American identity by not making Asian the marked half of the binary. In fact, Alex does not position Asian and American in tension, and instead he attempts to combine them as aspects of his everyday life. In both his survey and interview, Alex mentions "normal" to describe what he would like to see as public and positive representations of Asian Americans: "We could still use more representations… of just Asian Americans… of just Asian people that are just normal" (In-person interview). When I asked Alex if he is targeting a specific racial audience in his writing, he responds, "Well, yeah, I guess I… When I write it out, I'm not like, I'm thinking like, okay, I'm going to write it so it's related to everyone, but I can see how, how people can relate to it… I'm not, I'm not writing specifically for Asian-Americans, but if I, if they identify that's great" (11/26/2010). In fact, Alex explains his "relatable" characteristic as something not *only* located in his Asian-ness; he says, "I'm a generally, fairly relatable to everyone, and there

are, I mean there are some entries where they maybe more relatable to Asian people, but I'm more relatable to college-age students or whatever. *It's [the Asian part] some of me; it's not all of me*" (my emphasis). At first glance, Alex's response appears like a claim to individualism; he writes what he wants and his Asian-American experience happens to be part his writing. That is, he may believe that history and culture has no part in forming his identity. But I also read from this survey and from my in-person interview a discomfort with being seen as *only* Asian ("it's not all of me"). This discomfort challenged me to reread Alex; in placing his claim, "it's not all of me," next to his data showing his awareness of Asian-American issues (depicted by his reference to angryasianman.com), I read Alex as not rejecting Asian as a racial label or experience or "Chinese" as his ethnic identity. What he seems to reject is the totalizing description "Asian" can signify to others. Instead, Alex highlights his everyday experiences as American and as inflected by his racial identity but not defined by it. In this way, he recognizes cultural construction but does not think macrostructures of race (Asian as described in the public imaginary) or as microstructures (within his community) are enough to explain his experience either. He is not trying to step out of culture as much as show his agency within it.

This desire to be seen as more than only Asian shows up in other participant data (AJ, MariaBoscardin, and Sonlay). MariaBoscardin mirrors Alex's own belief that his ethnic and Asian identities are aspects of a more comprehensive self:

> My posts may not revolve or discuss my ethnic background, but everything that I write describes a fragment of me, a person who *is* Asian American. Because my profile picture implies that I am of Asian background, I too serve as a representative of the community. Although what I write represents myself and the community (to some extent), at the same time, it can show others that I *am* normal, that I *do* fit into the

> mainstream society, and that I do *not* serve (nor should be) as a perpetual foreigner due to the color of my skin. (original emphasis, survey)

MariaBoscardin's explanation here helps us understand Alex better. As with Alex, MariaBoscardin's move to normalize Asian American is by simultaneously claiming it and framing her ethnicity as a "fragment" of the whole, rather than treating her ethnicity or "Asian background" as the frame itself. Given this data and Alex's awareness of Asian-American issues (as evidenced by his remarks on the public's view of Asians), I do not see Alex claiming individualism. In taking into consideration his repeated use of "normal" as a descriptor for Asian-American representations, I believe Alex is attempting to normalize his own representations in "unmarking" the Asian aspect of his Asian-American identity as the main focus to his identity. If the "marked" identity is the one subject to examination and the "unmarked" and normal (white) identity operates as the standard by which marked others are assessed, I see Alex attempting to reconfigure this relationship by simultaneously placing less focus on his Asian-ness while broadening his frame from which others can see/read him and from which he perceives himself as more than just Asian, but also American (Chambers).

The combination of Alex's Asian-American perspective and his position as a popular and public voice—as a leader—affords him a particularly powerful role for informing racial formations in the community and broader public. In fact, examining many of his other blogs shows that Alex not only models an "Asian-American" perspective, he also defines it. He is known to create multimodal projects featuring community members. One of these projects is a series of videos called "XangaSecret," in which Alex solicits "secrets" from his readers to be featured in a mash-up of texts, images, and music (usually created by a Xangan like Matt). Sometimes these are themed,

as with the "Love and Heartache" one dedicated to Valentine's Day. These are highly popular productions and part of their appeal comes from readers wanting to know if someone has submitted a "secret" about them or if they can guess the subject of the "secret," given that the submitters are anonymous.

Typically, selected submissions are about secret crushes on other Xangans: "I would give my heart to 'Jane.' If only she was single and near me." But there are inclusions that are, as a few commenters noted, "dark": "These are cool, but so sad! You just want to give a lot of these people a great big hug" (02/14/2010). That is, these submissions can range from light-hearted confessions about liking someone to more serious matters, such as confessing about a miscarriage or being afraid for not being liked on Xanga: "I'm terrified that I'll never form any special bonds on Xanga because no one seems to respond to me very excitedly. Maybe I'm just a boring person but I really do like Xanga. Help? T_T [emoticon for crying]" ("XangaSecret" 08/30/2010). This later passage featured in the "Volume XIII" edition is particularly striking to me because it suggests that Xanga has a reputation for creating special bonds and close friendships, but this means that some people will be excluded from such relationships and from *representations of these relationships*. For example, one commenter wrote, "Im such a lame ass, but It [sic] felt like I had just seen myself on television when my face popped up in this. I will spend the rest of today with a false sense of importance :) These are great Alex, keep it up" (Commenter One). Commenter One's analogy to television is particularly telling in how these videos function on Xanga. These productions, created by Alex, replace pop media and culture's productions, positioning Alex in an important role of defining Asian American due to his ability to create and mediate cultural

productions as well as producing himself as a cultural object/identity in how audiences (both community and public) "consume" his writing and identity.

By representing some members, Alex necessarily excludes others. Exclusion is not something that Alex does intentionally—he was voted the "Nicest Xangan" and he replies to *all* comments, which I find incredible given the volume of comments he receives. Alex helps to define the community as a "tight-knit" group through productions representing members and their relationships and, in turn, solidifying his status as a significant voice of the community. This is reflected in one of Alex's blogs titled, "Xangans Supporting One Another (Literally)" (05/09/2010): "This post is a spiritual sequel to another post I made a while back titled 'My Xanga Picture Collaboration Project'. [sic] Like that post, I asked several Xangans to send me a picture of themselves doing a certain pose which I would later put together to give the illusion of interaction across different space." In scrolling down the page, readers see individual pictures of members in poses. These pictures are arranged so that members below each picture appear to be (literally) supporting the person or people above them with their hands (or feet).[52] This visual project spans multiple "pages" and at the bottom is Alex posing with one finger pointed up, indicating that he is holding everyone up with his one finger. After this visual collection, he writes:

> You know, after putting all those pictures together I noticed something. In a way, the above can be seen as a metaphor for something that a lot of us do here; we support one another through good and bad times. We sometimes forget that many people are on here writing because this is a wonderful place to express thoughts and worries that we can have trouble expressing in real life. […] It is unfortunate that negativity travels around fast, so it seems like it's everywhere when it's not. When you really think

[52] I do not include this picture because there are members involved who have not consented to the study.

> about think about it, it really only represent[s] a small (although loud) percentage of everyone here. There's decent folks around, and I'm glad to be friends with a lot of them.

Alex's role in producing this project is apparent in his reflections regarding his own processes: "I asked several Xangans to send me a picture of themselves doing a certain pose which I would later put together to give the illusion of interaction across different space." In selecting certain Xangans for this project, Alex sanctions and promotes a particular understanding of the community as "supportive." He calls attention to the fact that he is the one to "put together" this project so as "to give the illusion of interaction." This self-reflexive move underscores Alex's position as a critical producer because he is able to combine intention and awareness in shaping a particular representation of Xanga. This representation, in turn, informs how others perceive and interact with each other: community members practice these norms and public members wanting to be part of the community may adopt this view and practice in their writing.

I read Alex's writing as a rhetorical production emerging from a specific context and inducing a particular view of the community and of himself. By transforming the "illusion" of physical "support" into a metaphorical one, Alex promotes what he deems as appropriate behavior in this community in contrast to the "negativity" that seems to be "everywhere." Through his writing, Alex defines the perspective readers should adopt in being "we," as in "*we* support one another through good and bad times. *We* sometimes forget that many people are on here writing because this is a wonderful place to express thoughts…" (my emphasis). He re-writes the possible perspective held by members by casting doubt on the actual degree of "negativity" circulating on Xanga. While I agree

that readers "are seeing the world through [his] eyes," Alex is also transforming how readers see his "world" when they engage with his blogs.

Alex's ability to define the community is inextricably related to his ability to define himself for others. As the person at the bottom of the human pyramid, Alex visually and "metaphorically" argues for a perception of himself as foundational to the "supportive" community. That is, the placement of his own image suggests that he holds and/or lifts everyone else up, an indication of the power he has as a public voice to represent others and himself as the heart of the community. Members acknowledge this position in their comments, calling attention to Alex's role: "I have to add that because you're sort of like Mr. Xanga to a lot of folks, people may think there's a fair bit of pressure on your shoulders. But as the last picture shows, you're handling it very well" (Commenter One). This comment, in particular, recognizes the "weight" Alex carries in supporting others, such as his commitment to respond to every comment he receives and to lead and organize group events like meets. That this member labels Alex as "Mr. Xanga" is fitting due to his role as community leader and organizer, but this title supports members' perspective of Alex as a "public voice and figure" modeling an Asian-American identity to the community and the public.

Sonlay: "If you are secure about your sexuality…": Challenging Community Norms

Sonlay is similar to Alex in his position as a public voice and model for the community. But Sonlay significantly diverges from Alex in his intention to use his position to perform alternative and challenging ways of being Asian American by portraying alternative genders and sexualities and his approach to including this into the Asian-American experience. Sonlay is a well-established member who has been on

Xanga since 2003. While Alex is more varied in his multimodal projects representing the community, Sonlay's preferred style is vlogging (video blogging). His vlogs typically capture his everyday experiences rather than directly commenting on the community: Vlogs are "of friends, girlfriend, and going out [...] I feel I vlog for the memories" (Instant Messaging Interview 02/28/2011). This is not to say that his vlogs are any less significant in how they have afforded Sonlay a well-known, public voice among community members. Rather, Sonlay is known for this activity and his vlogging has inspired other members like Alexander (not to be confused with Alex) to start vlogging (Blog 10/20/2010). His position in the community tends to be in the context of vlogging or engaging in an online or offline event with other well-known members, such as Alex. In fact, Alex provides a description of Sonlay in a "Challenge" they organized for Xanga members: "Hailing from ------ is Sonlay. He's an extremely proficient vlogger that has created almost 100 vlogs already. I'm still amazed at his quality editing. Whenever I want to hear an honest opinion, I would go to him as he always calls it as it is" (07/31/2011).

Sonlay is a 22-year-old male who sees himself as "Asian" racially and "Laotian, Thai, Chinese, and Vietnamese" ethnically. Sonlay provided me with the clearest sense of how writers move through various stages and niches of their writing ecology. Instead of constructing the community as "supportive," Sonlay broadcasts his everyday life as challenges against community perceptions of what an Asian American looks like. In our interview I questioned Sonlay about audience responses: "Does seeing how others respond teach you something about your writing?" Sonlay takes up this question by describing his history with Xanga:

> Sonlay: I used to be popular and would only write things that people felt entertaining.
> Sonlay: so it would influence me on how my next post would be.
> Sonlay: Now it is *whatever*. I do post some things to entertain others on purpose, but most of the time *I am whatever*.
> Sonlay: *I post what I want more*.
> Me: Why the change?
> Sonlay: I had different phases.
> Sonlay: I have been on since 2003
> Sonlay: In the beginning I posted for myself then later posted to entertain others when I grew a following.
> Sonlay: When I was popular I just made sure that my posts were entertaining.
> Sonlay: Since then the popularity died due to me becoming less active and because a new generation of bloggers came in.
> Sonlay: I had my flavor of the week so now *I am just posting what I want*.
> Sonlay: I am not seeking that attention anymore like I used to.
> (my emphasis)

While this response seemed unprompted, I see now that Sonlay needed to establish his experience with Xanga as a way to address my inquiry into what he may have learned from his readers. That is, rather than a "yes" or "no" answer, Sonlay, intentionally or not, provided me a broader context for understanding what he learned. To be pointed, Sonlay's account may indicate that "learning" is not so easily encapsulated in a short answer, but rather requires chronicling in more detail his "phases" on Xanga. In the first few lines, Sonlay describes meeting audience expectations for "entertainment"; such reactions from his audience inform the production of the "next post." Learning to be seen, to be "popular," then, is a gradual process of understanding what counts as "entertaining" to readers. While this reading is not as comprehensive as I would like—Sonlay's earlier posts are beyond the scope of my research—Sonlay's passage mirrors a similar process to Nick in chapter four when Nick attempts to write himself into the community and learns what constitutes appropriate/successful approaches in the process. I read in Sonlay's passage that he, too, engaged the process of becoming a community

member through the recursive activity of writing and gauging community responses for "successful" writing.

Sonlay's awareness of his own transformation supports my observation that identity forms through major movements and developments in this writing ecology. But rather than becoming an established voice similar to Alex's trajectory, Sonlay's phases are marked by a decrease in popularity. He attributes this decrease to a confluence of reasons: being "less active" and "a new generation of bloggers." Yet, he ends this excerpt with attributing his phases to a change with himself: "I had my flavor of the week so now I am just posting what I want./ I am not seeking that attention anymore like I used to." This declaration in addition to his assertions of "whatever" and posting "what [he] want[s]" is important because, at first glance, Sonlay seems to be claiming a position outside of culture as a liberal individual unaffected by others. But to read Sonlay and this passage as indicative of an individualistic belief and nonchalant attitude is too simplistic. While his popularity may be relative to his own experiences—he is still very well-known and cited in the community—I find Sonlay's phases and his current position much more complex than a choice to write what he wants.

Sonlay's support of the community undercuts a reading of his "whatever" attitude and writing as distinct from or un-invested in the community. In his response to the "Asian Diaspora" question in the survey, Sonlay writes,

> Back in the day, I used to try and find out who I was in my Asian community. I was in the need to see what my *niche* was. Year later, I have found out who I am. It isn't really Asian related, but more like I found what kind of person I am. I admit I am still trying to see where I fit in the community, but as of now it isn't relevant. I am more focused on me as a person right now rather than who I am in the Asian community. (my emphasis)

This passage points to Sonlay's process in finding his "niche" among an "Asian community," and ultimately finding "what kind of person [he is]." Sonlay's self-community relationship was based on a racial identity, but in finding himself he no longer sees his identity as "Asian related."

"Asian," then, appears to have acted as a placeholder for Sonlay while he was seeking what it means to be raced, but the relevancy of "Asian Diaspora," his "Asian community," and the "Asian" label faded once he "found what kind of person" he is, indicating a different position in relation to his community. *Being* Asian or Asian American, for Sonlay, means not needing to call attention to it. Similar to Alex, Sonlay still recognizes himself as raced and existing in relationship to macrostructures and community narratives, but he no longer defines himself only in these terms. It seems as if Sonlay needs the community much less for "finding himself" than members may need people like him for leading the community. In our interview Sonlay reflected on his survey response expressing the difficulty many Asian Americans face in having to "incorporate both Asian and American in their lives." He goes on to explain, "I feel like we have to satisfy both different cultures and try to put them together. […] Its [sic] like we have to follow two different sets of rules and norms." While Sonlay acknowledges this experience, he does not currently blog about it like Chris or Coolmonkey. Instead, his intention to support members, rather than needing support, becomes clear when he describes coming across such writing about these cultural and racial conflicts: "When I see them it just makes me want to comment to show they aren't alone./ Show I have experienced the same and if I haven't [experienced the same then] show that I agree with them. /Even if you haven't experienced it, you can show you support their thought." In

this way, we can see Sonlay as invested in his community and as forging his identity in relationship to it; however, Sonlay does not pit the community against a larger public; he tries to bring the two together.

Sonlay employs an edgier, contrary ethos (compared to Alex) in his writing portraying his version of a "regular dude who isn't going to look at life through only one perspective. A guy who embraces his heritage and culture, but not a person who will boast it for pride" (survey). As with Alex, Sonlay attempts to balance his ethnic and racial selves in a way that makes it "regular" rather than marked and different, but unlike Alex this "regular" identity conflicts with community norms rather than affirming them. I see this in some of his blogs modeling his "different perspective" on being Asian and American. In his blog, "I Don't Get Good Grades Because I'm Not Smart," Sonlay argues for hard work rather than natural intelligence for achieving success and good grades: "People just need to learn that they need to work hard in order to achieve the things they want" (10/17/2010). He goes on to state, "I don't consider myself the smartest student in my classes or the smartest student out of my friends, but I do know that I am one of the hardest workers. This is why I think it is dumb to hear people think you need to be smart in order to earn things." In the context of the community, this blog was surprising to me because there was no mention of Asian or Asian stereotypes in the whole blog spanning six paragraphs and explicating why Sonlay finds this attitude a "self-defeating ideology." Although I assumed that Sonlay knew about these stereotypes from his survey data, I asked him in our interview to reflect on this absence. He states, "I feel like it [Asians being smart] is a quality people use to profile us. […] This expectation makes it seem that is all we are." Sonlay goes on to praise the comments

addressing the “purpose” of his blog on hard work over one comment out of the twenty-six joking that Asians just know how to “Work harder!” (Commenter One). This preference underscores Sonlay’s desire to dismantle the smart, nerdy Asian stereotype by “unmarking” issues of school and success as innate to Asians.

Without explicitly saying that Asians and Asian Americans may view themselves as “dumb” or “below average” because they do not meet stereotypical expectations of being smart and successful in school, Sonlay challenges this image by presenting an alternative one; he performs this example of success through hard work rather than an inherent characteristic of being Asian. This blog, then, presents an intentional construction of identity normalizing concerns over school and success as a common, everyday aspect of Sonlay’s life rather than one framed by racial labels. While it implicitly refers to the successful Asian stereotype, Sonlay’s blog attempts to shift the focus away from race (because “that is not all we are”) and toward an issue about success unhinged from race. This is a rather complex blog for Sonlay to construct because he attempts to balance a topic that is simultaneously about and not about race. It is an issue that most Asian Americans have to deal with in being read as “nerdy” and “successful,” but Sonlay challenges this stereotype by making it less about race and more about individual character, providing other members who see themselves caught up in meeting or failing this success standard and myth, this “positive” but damaging stereotype, an alternative way to see themselves as more than “just Asian” and, therefore, more than this stereotype framing Asian and Asian American.

I read Sonlay’s “whatever” attitude, then, as a position in which he is less concerned with what members think or say about him and more interested in providing a

perspective informed but not defined by his Asian-ness. In other words, he writes what he wants, but this ethos is constructed on his ability to write from a position unmoored from his desire to seek a stable Asian identity and perhaps even acceptance as evidenced by his past writings that acquired him popularity and explicit acceptance: "I used to be popular and would only write things that people felt entertaining." Similar to Alex, Sonlay goes on to state, "when people see my perspective of life *through an Asian perspective* that it allows them to see things different./ I look at things [as] a person and *not just an Asian person* (my emphasis)." Sonlay articulates his desire to be seen as more than just racially one-dimensional. His awareness that people will see things differently when they read his writing shifts his writing from something that may sound indifferent or individualistic to something that is much more thoughtful and intentional. In his survey, Sonlay notes that he would spend five to six hours a week just reading and commenting on Xanga. He would devote up to fourteen hours a week when he included vlogging projects. Such actions point to an invested and caring member who remains connected to the community but, also, someone who can and does write against community norms.

His "whatever" ethos makes sense in light of his blogs challenging community norms as shown with his post, "I Don't Get Good Grades," but his position as a public voice orientated toward the community is most salient in his blog about race, gender, and sexuality. In a blog-vlog mix-up titled "Transsexual/Transgender/Tranny' Restaurant and Dance Show," Sonlay recounts his dining experience at a transgendered restaurant and bar:

> Over the weekend, it was my buddy's birthday, "Allie." […] For Allie's birthday she decided that she wanted to have it at a place called, "Asia

> SF". Since I didn't know much of the place I told her, "Sure, I'm down for anything." […] However, the interesting part is that the whole restaurant's staff and dancers are transsexual and transgenders (in reality, we found out only two staff members were real women, but they were bus girls.) So yeah… it was quite the experience and I doubt many of you have the right to say you have been to a place like this.

Sonlay sets up his blog with a textual introduction detailing his "going out" experience, but the narrative provides a potentially challenging turn of events when Sonlay realizes the restaurant features transsexual and transgendered entertainers (singing and dancing) as patrons dine. In this passage, I see Sonlay simultaneously attempting to normalize and make exceptional his trip to Asia SF. He begins his post in a typical-to-the-community account of weekend adventures. Sonlay's matter-of-fact way of relating his experiences also positions this event as something ordinary. Yet, Sonlay's last line, "it was quite the experience" highlights this event as not only unique but an experience that he has been privy to and others are missing out on. Sonlay, in effect, turns this event into bragging rights. In this way, Sonlay performs an alternative and even challenging attitude and approach to different genders and sexuality within his Asian-American community.

Sonlay's blog is particularly striking in a community I have observed as masculine and largely unaccepting of alternative gender and sexual identities.[53] In his development on Xanga, Sonlay is aware of this also. When I asked him about this blog, Sonlay states, "I know a lot of Asians who are sheltered and have a limited view. Especially toward people who choose to be gay." In fact, Sonlay said he wrote this with the "hope it shows that there are people who embrace it and accept others./ Even though there are people who dislike your 'type'. [sic] There are many others who are accepting

[53] See chapter four for a more detailed account on gender and sexuality issues and dynamics.

to it." Sonlay's awareness that most community members are "limited" in their view of "gay" people informs his construction of this blog underscoring his earlier claim that he "writes what [he] want[s]" relative to community beliefs and norms. Sonlay, then, understands community norms but intentionally and actively writes against them as a way to reach out and show potentially marginalized members that "there are people who embrace and accept others." Additionally, Sonlay performs an embrace of difference, modeling for others how to approach, understand, and accept an Asian-American identity diverging from their own experiences.

What Sonlay posts after this introduction passage is rhetorically noteworthy: "**Spoiler Alert**: My friend, "Jess," gave her bra away for free shots at their downstairs club/bar so if you are a straight man hopefully this can tempt you to watch (original emphasis)." (Sonlay embeds a video of his night following this sentence.) I read this as Sonlay's attempt to get typically disinterested or even homophobic readers to watch his video by appealing to readers' heteronormative orientations. The video features Sonlay's friends and his dining experience, but it also included transsexual and transgendered people serving patrons and entertaining as Cher and other such celebrity look-alikes. The visual aspect of Sonlay's blog is important to consider as a rhetorical construction embedded in the context of Sonlay's intentions to inform others of difference. The video is shot from Sonlay's perspective—he holds the camera—as an "Asian" hetero-male "seeing" and experiencing this restaurant, literally providing an "Asian-American" perspective for viewers. Through overt and tacit approval of this experience (as evidenced by him and others stating this is "cool" or in holding the camera's gaze on stage routines), Sonlay performs an accepting attitude and position in addition to his

textual challenges for community members to "re-see" Asian-American as an identity including multiple and alternative genders and sexualities.

Posted at the end of the blog is a conclusive paragraph stating,

> Overall it was a really fun experience and many of the ladies were fun and looked really good. You couldn't tell they used to be men. So if you are ever in the area I recommend you to check this place out with friends. However, you must be open to new things and different people in order to enjoy the place. If you are secure about your sexuality and don't mind trying something new, definitely check it out. If not, go somewhere else.

In the conclusion, Sonlay appeals to the reader's character in arguing for the Asia SF experience. By suggesting that "you must be open to new things and different people," Sonlay insinuates that readers who are close-minded would not view this as a "fun experience" and, thereby, aligns negative character traits (being close-minded) to how one views gender and sexual differences. In contrast, Sonlay aligns sexual confidence to being "open" to "something new." I also read the sentence, "If you are secure…" as a challenge against heteronormative readers in framing their outlook on difference as related to their own sexuality, indicating that people who are willing to experience Asia SF are also secure in their own sexuality and people who are not willing to "try something new" may be sexually suspect. In short, Sonlay suggests that trying something new actually affirms one's sexuality because it should not be a threatening experience.

Comparing Sonlay to a participant like Nick (chapter four) highlights the differences in their positions. I cannot see someone like Nick writing a blog about Asia SF or posting topics challenging community norms. Nick simply does not have the public and community platform that Sonlay has developed over the years; reactions from the public attest to members' swift capacity for disciplining and rejecting Nick. But

Sonlay does not seek acceptance in the same way, allowing him to write these blogs that are not dependent on the community's approval. Also, he does not seek public attention because, as he stated in his interview, "I am not seeking that attention anymore like I used to." In fact, Sonlay goes on to explain that he is more interested in what his Xanga friends have to say about his blogs rather than gaining more readers and fans. His desire to be entertaining so as to gain popularity has changed/diminished as his identity and positions changed. His comments, in fact, are absent of any oppositional responses although there are fewer (about a dozen) comments given to this blog compared to his other ones. This blog did receive over 300 views, suggesting its high level of exposure to community and public viewers. Absence of opposing or challenging comments is especially odd for this topic, but this may very well be due to Sonlay's position as a popular and respected member. His friendship with Alex and Alexander is very well known, and such opposition against Sonlay may end up alienating any opposing member rather than the other way around. That is, Sonlay writes what he wants because he is in a position to do so. And instead of posting in a way that affirms and defines community relationships, like Alex, Sonlay uses his position as a public voice to perform alternative perspectives and behaviors toward Asian Americans and their differing genders and sexualities.

<u>Raquel: "I'm some form of media": Bridging Asian and American</u>

One of the most radical and complex participants is Raquel, who performs intersectional racial identities that are not only challenging to members on Xanga but, also, to common understandings of what constitutes (or doesn't constitute) Asian American. While she may not be as popular as Alex or Sonlay—her role as leader is less

established—Raquel's awareness of herself as "media" affords her opportunities to perform racial identities defying interpretation by both community and public members. Raquel is readily accepted by the community; her relationship with Chris, for example, has been documented in blogs and Alex often responds and recommends her writing to others. Yet public readers who come across her profile and writing may be confused and challenged by how to perceive Raquel; much of her writing performs an Asian-American identity, but her images signify African American to readers within an Asian-American community. Community members, while accepting of Raquel, are confronted by writing challenging them to rethink race because she enacts Asian racially and Japanese ethnically as cultural performances. Raquel is able to do this because she embraces a position of media that goes further than Alex and Sonlay's modeling of Asian American. As media, Raquel understands herself representing slippery performances of race, rather than being limited by macro levels of racial categories.

Raquel is a 19-year-old female who notes "Black and Filipina" as her race, but goes on to explain, "I identify as African American." She also answers "American" as her ethnicity (survey). In this way, she is atypical of the Asian-American members in the community; her racial and ethnic identities may visually signify something other than Asian, but her blogging identity and cultural performance on Xanga indicate a more complex production of identity combining various cultural and racial indices, including Asian. While Raquel does not identify with Asian in her survey, she textually performs Asian in her blogs, showing others that Asian can be part of other identities and illustrating a more performative approach to race. Raquel explains that while her grandfather is Filipino, he was not a part of Raquel's life: "So, even though it's [her

Filipina heritage] part of her [Raquel's mother], she knows nothing about the culture, and I don't either, so I can't really say that I can claim it." Instead, Raquel recalls growing up in a mixed-race neighborhood:

> I grew up in a mostly Black and Hispanic, Portuguese and Brazilian school. Um… I think if I was, say probably, if my family was white, I don't think I would have lived in this town that I lived in. So… because, because of, I guess, my race, my mom probably felt comfortable being around other people that were similar to us and my father. So… I made the friends that I made and a lot of them, I talk about in my blogs, well used to talk about in my blogs, and places that I go. (Skype Interview 09/18/2010)

As a participant who knows she is part Filipina but claims and identifies as African American, Raquel's own identity position in this passage and among her online community is particularly complex. In this passage, Raquel calls attention to how her family's racial makeup influences who they live among, suggesting that she and her family are aware their bodies signify racial difference in a way that matters materially (where they live) and culturally (community relations). Raquel's passage also suggests her understandings of race and ethnicity are not biological givens but, instead, constructed on and through the body and through one's social relations that may not align with one's phenotype or ethnic lineage. This awareness allows Raquel to enact identities in relationship with an Asian-American community and a broader public without having to claim these collectives and their identities as defining her.

In the following passage, I asked Raquel if she thinks people can tell that she is part Filipina. She states, "I have gotten it sometimes. I get, 'Are you mixed?' a lot. Frequently." In fact, Raquel goes on to provide descriptions similar to what many of the participants experience in being asked "Where are you from?":

> Me: How do you feel about that?

> Raquel: I don't know. I don't know how to feel about that. I just say, "No not really," and I say I'm American. And they don't believe me, and they say, "Where are your parents from?" and "Where do your grandparents come from?"
> Me: That's interesting. Where do you think that kind of question comes from?
> Raquel: I always wondered that too, coz I… when I look in the mirror, I don't think I look mixed at all. But that's just me. But… when I see my mother, they are like, "Oh my god, you have to be." They just don't believe me.
> […]
> Well, sometimes I do narrow it down, like I say New Jersey or my grandmother's from Georgia, but they always expect me to say a foreign country, and when I don't say that, they get annoyed. And they keep pushing it, like "Are you sure?" Like, did you just ask me if I'm sure? Whatever.

If "Asian American" as a collective identity forms around shared experiences, such as being marked as foreign in broader cultural and public arenas, then Raquel could be considered Asian American in this way. Although she can be read as African American and describes herself as such, she signifies ambiguity enough to be subject to the "foreign" and therefore "not American" treatment. But this slippery reading around African-American as an identity makes any concrete "race" difficult to discern, something Raquel seems to want to highlight by answering the ethnic question in terms of "American" as a nationality.

Because her mother is half Filipina (and I assume looks more "Asian" according to Raquel's data), Raquel seems to empathize with part of the Asian-American experience. She describes times when her mother's body signifies foreign-ness and, hence, a lack of English-speaking capacity to others: "Even though she's with me, someone still assumes she needs, like, ahhh help with her English. Like, 'Oh, are you her translator [referring to herself]?' What? So I was really taken aback. I'm her daughter, not her translator." This incident happened again after the New York Xanga Meet when

Raquel was with Chris[54] and on their way home. A stranger approached Chris and asked if he spoke English. Raquel expressed offense, given that she was sure the stranger saw Chris speaking to Raquel. She states, “It’s like he basically forgot all of his surroundings and was really blind and just saw oh, he must be Chinese, he must not be able to speak English.” Through her own experiences of being read as foreign and seeing her mother and friend subjected to these foreign narratives, Raquel understands that the people are racially defined. These events and Raquel’s metaphor underscore her comprehension that bodies can be misread, erroneously interpreted in relation to cultural and/or ethnic characteristics: the stranger does *not see* Chris (“[he] was really blind”) because he signified “Chinese” and, therefore, must speak Chinese.

Like Sonlay, Raquel challenges the community to think beyond racial stereotypes, both about their own community and the Black community, by using her body and cultural performances to question Asian-American identity. In this way, she uses her intersectionality and her own fluid positions within racial micro- and macrostructures to compel the community to look at itself through the eyes of larger, public race relations while challenging the public audience and perspectives of reading Asian Americans as *only* tied to Asian bodies. I see Raquel bringing this awareness to her Xanga profile and writing. In her blog titled, “Don’t sit me with black people,” Raquel recounts her experience as a waitress and the racial issues that come with it:

> Every shift, the waiters come in and the first thing they do is stop at the host stand, look at the chart, look at their section and say, “Sit me with rich looking people.” Ok, that makes sense. They want a good tip right? But that’s usually followed by: “Don’t sit me with any black people.” […] It’s not only black people they say this about though. They say it

[54] Chris is a participant highlighted in chapter four.

> about Hispanics and Asians as well. (The rumor is that Hispanics only leave 5 dollars even if the bill was over $100 and Asians rarely tip at all.)

Raquel goes on to challenge this perspective of "black guests" as "really bad tippers" by positing that "stereotypes will be true, if you treat it to be true." She argues that guests will be able to tell if waiters do not like them and, therefore, tip badly based on the waiter's treatment rather than the guests' race. This blog received around 1300 views and 68 comments. In this particular blog, Raquel appears to be aligned with an African-American identity by centering most of her narrative around waiters' treatment of "black guests" and because her profile picture signifies an ambiguous Black body. But in her interview, she discloses, "most of my coworkers were either Black or Hispanic and they were the ones saying 'Don't sit me with Black people.' So I'm guessing either they are like that, or they experience people like that and lump the entire culture together." Although she did not mention the waiters' racial identities in her blog, Raquel noted that she was "trying to point out ignorance even with people in the same culture." Her intention highlights a comprehension of race and racism that goes beyond race as a dynamic between different groups; Raquel calls attention to how a group internalizes and maintains stereotypes about themselves: "they […] lump the entire culture together." Her observation indicates an awareness of race as a dynamic relationship between macro and micro formations, between broader dominant powers and smaller group collectives.

While she grounds her blog in her own observations about "black guests," her inclusion of Hispanic and Asian stereotypes presents this blog as multi-racial. Her statement, "The stereotypes will be true, if you treat it to be true" takes this out of the realm of being about just Black people and focuses it more on self-fulfilling perceptions of others. This is the line that readers (both from the public and the Asian-American

community) address often in their comments from a waiter/waitress or a patron's point of view: "I'm black and I make it a thing of mine to tip well. So I guess someone might lose out in my good business because of that" (Commenter One); "I try to tell the people at my job that the people can tell. THEY REALLY CAN!" (Commenter Two). Raquel, in effect, depicts how racial stereotypes become stereotypes that both insiders and outsiders come to believe in, and this explanation helps some readers approach race in new ways. Mark, an Asian-American (ethnically "Japanese") participant, writes, "I never thought about [it] this way, but I think we really do end up judging people before they have a chance to prove themselves. Our prejudices condition us to believe a certain way, and that belief often times becomes self-fulfilling. It's not surprising to know that racial profiling is not an easy thing to break." Mark's comment evidences readers picking up on Raquel's explanation of racial formation, indicating that narratives about process, as with Alex and Sonlay, provides readers at least a more comprehensive way of understanding race. Such narratives produce a different epistemology of race by focusing on process rather than the binary relationship between Asian-ness and whiteness, shifting racial formation from a white center.

This blog highlights the racial complexity Raquel brings to her writing, but her overall identity production on Xanga makes this particular blog even more difficult to pin down racially or ethnically. Raquel often writes about Japanese culture, her Asian-American friends, and her cosplay hobby. Cosplay (short for costume play), as she and other members explained to me, is when fans of science and fantasy fiction (anime, comic books, novels, video games, board games, fan-fiction, film, and etc.) dress up like their favorite character and attend informal gatherings or national and international

conventions. Visiting Raquel's page, then, can be a racially subversive experience in itself; some of her cosplay pictures show an African-American woman dressed up in anime costume and in her writing she addresses Japanese culture and language because she aspires to teach English in Japan. By placing the blog, "Don't sit me with the black people," against this context, her alignment with African-American/Black identity becomes much less clear. Indeed, she is aware of her indeterminate and slippery racial performances:

> Me: If a stranger come[s] to your site, how do you think they would perceive of that specific blog (about Japanese culture) in relation to your own identity as being African American? […]
> Raquel: I think they'd be surprised. I don't think they would expect me to be behind the words.
> Me: Do you think that helps you challenge some stereotypes about race?
> Raquel: I think so. I really think so.

Raquel's slippery productions of race play visual expectations against cultural performances and vice versa, complicating what Asian American means for community members and readers from the broader public. Her adoption of Japanese culture posits race as a performance rather than an inherent, biological characteristic and this becomes particularly clear when Raquel reveals her Filipina heritage but admits she doesn't feel like she can claim it due to her unfamiliarity with Filipina culture. Learned culture, then, plays a large role in how Raquel views ethnic and racial identities. In her survey, Raquel writes,

> "Negative" representations of Asians are the ones that tend to lump them all into that one over exaggerated nerdy category (anima, ninjas, DDR,[55] being extremely intelligent, etc). Especially when it comes to Japanese men and Japanese cultures. It's to the point where if you like things from those cultures, you're looked at negatively too. […] I tend to like weird

[55] DDR stands for Dance, Dance, Revolution, an interactive virtual dance game.

> people so I guess you can say I like some of the "negative" stereotypes Asians are pinned with sometimes. (question #17)

How "Asian" as a race is represented causes Raquel to affiliate with Asian through Japanese culture even when she knows or, rather, because she knows that these representations are "negative."

Raquel's intentional adoption/performance of a Japanese-Asian identity due to its negative representations makes more sense in light of her interview. I asked Raquel to comment on Mark's response to her blog (above) recounting on her waitressing experience and tipping etiquette:

> Me: Um… so like for him, when he writes, "I never thought about it this way," how do you feel that you helped him to think about it this way?
> Raquel: It feels really cool. [we both laugh]
> Me: Can you elaborate on that?
> Raquel: I dunno… for one of my English classes, I had to choose a topic, and I chose media and how that influences society. And, I had to elaborate a reason when the class first started I had to give a reason as to why. And I thought about it, and it's like, okay, I'm a blogger. I guess, technically I'm some form of media. I influence people, even if I don't think I really do, in the end I really do. So, it's just really interesting to realize that. (my emphasis 09/18/2010)

For Raquel, a blogger is a "form of media" and this is no small claim to make, particularly when "media" is seen by so many participants as "Hollywood" or what is shown to them on television and the Internet. We see this with Coolmonkey who views Fox News as an external entity to "fight" against. But unlike Coolmonkey, Raquel does not depend on an oppositional relationship with broader media in order to construct her identity. Raquel's awareness that *she is media* highlights her Japanese-Asian identity as performances: she represents instead of being represented.

This racial-ethnic slippage can be seen in Raquel's blog, "Bridging Japan and America." In this blog Raquel writes about culture that does not fetishize Japanese

culture or place it counter to “America” in her narrative about becoming part of The Bridge Club, an organization on her college campus. She writes from a position in which she is both and neither Asian American:

> According to the club’s president, “Andrew,” the club started about 6 years ago when some members of JSA (Japanese Student Association) broke away from a group to start their own. […] the environment was a little strict and the American members felt like they were being left out of the circle.   They wanted to start something where everyone could join no matter what level of Japanese they were on. Something where both American and Japanese students could connect with each other and learn from each other without being cliquish and without leaving anyone in the dust. So the Bridge club was formed.

As “media,” Raquel promotes a view that is inclusive rather than reductive. That is, she brings attention to how clubs can be culturally or racially exclusive and models an alternative organization to clubs based on national and cultural inclusion. She goes on to write “They learn from us, and we learn from them,” placing members of the Bridge Club on equal grounds, regardless of their national or cultural origins. The construction of Raquel’s own identity is particularly striking because she claims “American” while simultaneously admitting to the potential contribution American and Japanese members can provide each other, a claim that gets played out in much more contested ways with participants in previous chapters. As media, Raquel understands herself framing racial dynamics as circulating representations in the community and public arena. As media, Raquel replaces dominant media and culture’s production of identity with her own identities and experiences, resulting in writing that sets up American as a given rather than American as “out there,” aligned with whiteness and an excluding public imaginary. American, in her view, includes slippery representations of ethnic and racial identities.

Conclusion

The chapter's progression—Alex, Sonlay, and Raquel—illustrates developing racial complexity with how participants' habitation of the public/pop cultural identity affords them a certain position and orientation within the community and broader public. While Alex uses his position as "Mr. Xanga" to foster community bonds, Sonlay employs the distance a public platform affords him from the community in order to challenge community norms. He is in a position to not care what others think, and this allows him to forward arguments for a more inclusive Asian-American identity. Raquel is admittedly the most difficult participant to analyze in light of this community-public imaginary because her racial performances are slippery and intentionally challenging. Yet this progression illustrates how process narratives model for readers in both community and public imaginaries an alternative way to claim Asian *and* American as a cultural performance amidst racial mis-readings from outsiders and insiders to the community.

This progression can be read, then, as participants' movement toward seeing themselves as critical producers rather than consumers, in which the confluence of awareness, intention, and technology affords an identity and position such as Raquel's claim *to be* media, demonstrating how media is more than a technology (as in television or the Internet) or a reflection of culture (as in pop representations) but an identity and position individuals can assume through particular developments through a social network site. In illustrating the movement from consumer to critical producer, participants in this chapter highlight the racial work that a pop culture/public voice and position does. Here, we see not only racial formation within the current macro- and

microstructures, but also the attempt to rewrite those structures through a digital affordance to "be media."

Whether the aim is to affirm, challenge, or interrogate Asian American, all three participants enact process narratives to model an alternative approach and way of being Asian-American as an identity that can be "balanced" and/or constantly broadened to include other marked and unmarked differences. Raquel, particularly, challenges readers from both community and public audiences to rethink race not as a contained category, but as intersectional and continuously shifting cultural performances. Being media, a critical producer position, allow these participants to produce racial images impacting other writers. This study suggests the process of racial formation is not only inextricably related to one's relationship to community and the public, but also to mediating tools in which racial representations inform and create realities and new knowledge about race. The study argues for the potential for community and public affordances of technology for transforming race through the friction and negotiation between self and others, not in the Habermasian "public" sense of rational-critical debate, but through the movement and production of identity in a digital writing ecology.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION: AFFORDANCES OF DIGITAL WRITING ECOLOGIES

Summary of Findings

I started this project with broad inquiries regarding the relationship between Asian Americans, online technology, and racial formation as macro and micro levels of cultural and social processes. My main research question, "How are Asian Americans using new technologies to construct and represent their identities through acts of digital writing?" allowed me to explore a small community within Xanga's larger social networking site, confirming my expectations that Asian Americans are significantly engaging in digital formations of race. In fact, participants showed that they were not "doing what [they] have always done," as cautioned by Elaine Richardson's epigraph in chapter one. Rather, writers in this researched community construct race in ways that have been overlooked by race and/or technology scholars, and this finding complicates the very few works within our field addressing the intersection of race and technology. Kevin Eric De Pew maps out this oversight in the vein of empowerment:

> scholars […] merely support claims about users' success or failure; these claims are then generalized to make arguments about specific technologies' liberatory potential. Conversely, scholars rarely use this evidence to explain why the users they studied succeeded or failed at empowering themselves—an explanation that would be based upon a rhetorical analysis of user practices and, if possible, audience reception. Instead, these narratives of digital transformation have mostly been about computer users who move seamlessly from the corporeal body to the virtual body and back again. ("The Body of Charlie Brown" 106)

As De Pew suggests, this oversight is mainly due to work focusing on the Internet's "liberatory potential" or on the body's "seamless" movement between online and offline sites. Granting that "writers' ideological positions" traversing online-offline boundaries

is an important subject to examine, De Pew rightfully points out how the absence of particular methodology ("rhetorical analysis" and "audience reception") has prevented the field from understanding technology's role in identity formation (112, 107; see also De Pew "Through the Eyes of Researchers"). My ethnographic approach including interviews of writers and audience reception does, indeed, provide a richer understanding of technology and, specifically, Xanga's affordance of a writing ecology. Such approaches provided me unexpected data, challenging me to re-conceptualize the relationship between macro- and microstructures of racial formation as fostered by a digital writing ecology. Reconceiving the researched community in this way, rather than through static tropes, was central to my understanding of how participants' developed Asian-American identities because it allowed me to examine racial identity as instantiations, movements, and processes through specific niches/positions within a writing system.

Conceiving of Xanga as a writing ecology led me to one of my most unexpected and critical findings in this project: the interplay between community and public imaginaries. Due to scholarship's treatment of community (Pratt; Banks) and public (Habermas; Warner) as separate categories of analysis, this data perplexed me, especially when participants expressed that both community and public audiences and spaces motivated them to write on Xanga. Through the lens of a writing ecology, I saw that these two imaginaries were not exclusive, but existed in productive tension for participants, affording them specific positions within their community for generating and developing racial identities. Participants' perceptions of community and the public fundamentally informed their writing about race, and functioned as the conceptual frame

for chapters four through six. By juxtaposing participants' background contexts against this community and public data, I realized participants' alienating experiences within their home enclave and broader public arenas (such as school and work places)—what I called a double negation of identity in chapter four—shape their desire to seek belonging in community and public sites on Xanga. Xanga's blogring function, in fact, allows Asian Americans experiencing this double negation to find each other through blogrings like "Asian Diaspora," illustrating online technology's affordances for group and racial formation around desires for seeking and sharing ethnic and raced experiences.

As members developed and changed, so too did their conceptions of community and public imaginaries. Chapter five highlighted how participants, after achieving a stable community position, place these imaginaries into a binary relationship in which participants come to represent the community as they orient themselves toward an externalized public, highlighting issues of representations within and beyond the community. In this instantiation, participants collapsed the public with their notions of popular culture/media, treating them as interchangeable concepts. This binary allowed participants a way to examine and/or recolonize positions typically inhabited by whiteness, while celebrating and representing their Asian-ness within a supportive community. The collapse of the public and pop culture led me to claim a significant insight about the relationship between these two concepts: pop culture, although not synonymous with the public, functions to represent "the public" to the public, highlighting the political and cultural work representations do in including and excluding people in the public imaginary and the importance of new technologies' role in providing

marginal groups the ease and access to media tools for repurposing and transforming images (textual, visual, multimodal) made about them and by dominant agendas.

Participants in chapter six move beyond an ethos dependent on a community-Asian and white-public binary, instead modeling process-narratives that combine Asian and American identities and experiences. The balance these participants strike between Asian and American emerges from a position of being pop culture and the public, orientated toward both public and community audiences. What was once externalized and critiqued as "out there" becomes a locale from which they write. Writing as part of pop culture allows these participants leadership positions among their community, modeling/mirroring for others how to be Asian *and* American through affirmations and challenges regarding what this identity means in relation to other, differing intersections of identities: gender, sexual, racial, and ethnic. Instead of calling attention to "Asian" as different and Other within the Asian-American construct, these participants attempt to normalize Asian and American as everyday narratives, thereby shifting racial constructions away from whiteness as a central/center origin and epistemology of race.

While this study focused on the microstructures of race, participants often engaged with macrostructures by engaging with dominant-produced stereotypes, gender and sexuality issues, and whiteness. By treating Xanga as a writing ecology, I see race forming where these two levels meet, where writers are negotiating their own understandings and experiences with race against broader cultural productions. This writing ecology also places writers in relation to others who share or contest their views in supportive and challenging fashion, affording them the support and coalition for seeking a self, but pressing them to articulate themselves in light of micro differences

among their very community. The ecology also provides difference in the form of an ever-evolving community within the broader context of a public, thereby allowing writers opportunities to take on public issues and voices and, hence, identities as they are supported by a core group of members. Xanga's simultaneous affordances of community-public positions and audiences and participants' desire to engage with both imaginaries informs the production of Asian-American rhetoric as a symbolic resource circulated and employed by writers in this studied community. Angeline's rhetorical combination of racialized images and texts to create knowledge about her community and public, for example, is a significant discovery into how Asian Americans are creating rhetoric particular to their raced experience and digital space.

Implications of Findings

For participants and, I would argue, all of us, race exists as multiple and simultaneous understandings and experiences. Addressing this sort of complexity may be done best through digital writing ecologies that can accommodate the fluid nature and multiplicity of race and its intersections with other identities. We see this through the community-public imaginaries engaged by participants: simultaneous racial constructions for either or both of these imaginaries allow participants to express more comprehensive, complex selves than less heterogeneous, offline spaces, while allowing the potential for change and transformation as writers move through the ecology. Sites such as Xanga can also challenge singular ways of being raced, as Raquel shows us in chapter six. Instead of subjecting herself to macro contexts, as in "acting" African American due to her visual cues, Raquel can inhabit intersectional identities through the confluence and conflict between visual and textual performances challenging community

and public notions of Asian-American. As Rajani Sudan notes in her work on cyberspace and visual culture, "believing is seeing," indicating that our ideologies and positions frame our sight and how we view ourselves and others (72). Users like Raquel confound this sight and, hence, ideology, by performing slippery racial and ethnic identities.

Participants like Raquel suggest that digital writing technologies can shift ideologies regarding race, but more specifically, it answers Mao and Young's call for works "that focus on how Asian Americans use language to perform discursive acts and on how they develop persuasive and other rhetorical strategies to create knowledge, to effect social, political, and cultural transformations" (3). While authors in their collection go on to explore Asian American rhetoric, this study extends such work by showing how participants generate and employ Asian American rhetoric as formative to an Asian-American identity that is both in the process of becoming and being. The arc of the chapters underscores Asian-American identity as a process; "this state of becoming or indeterminacy" is cause for both participants' struggles in belonging (Nick, Chris, and Angeline), but individual chapters show participants in moments of being, as in being a public voice and leader for the community (Alex, Sonlay, and Raquel) (6). In these occasions of being and becoming, participants enact rhetoric to find themselves and support others. This is most clear with Sonlay who notes, "I used to try and find out who I was in my Asian community" (survey). Yet, his movement and development, fostered by his digital writing acts and engagements, allow him to *be in the position* of Asian and American and of supporting other members in the community by writing to show others they are not alone, performing coalition with the outliers of his own community (Instant Messaging Interview 02/28/2011).

This study also confirms and extends on Mao and Young's claim that "Asian Americans are no longer the objects of translation and transformation; rather, they become the agents of translation and transformation as they make *their* claim on America through their rhetorical acts" (11). As media, Alex, Sonlay, and Raquel are significant agents of translation for and of others in their community, acting as cultural producers and mirrors in which other members see their image reflected back to them. These rhetorical performances, as Barbara Myerhoff contends, "are opportunities for appearing, an indispensable ingredient of being itself, for unless we exist in the eyes of others, we may come to doubt even our existence" (233; see also Labrador). "Appearing" or representation, as Myerhoff's suggests, highlights the importance of social network sites for providing and depicting social relations so that participants like Sonlay are able to "find" themselves among others of similar backgrounds and shared experiences.

Besides contributions to racial formation and Asian American rhetoric, understanding Xanga as a writing ecology has significant implications for pedagogical considerations. The community-public aspects of this study complicate our traditional understanding of the rhetorical context as a relationship *only* between writer, purpose, and audience. But deconstructing this imaginary as simultaneous audiences and spaces can inform a nuanced approach to the teaching of rhetoric and, hence, the writing that students can do. This study also indicates that writing pedagogy would benefit from considering online spaces as digital writing ecologies with the ability to accommodate various and simultaneous instantiations of community and public imaginaries, and perhaps other imaginaries not observed in this study. Inviting students to write in ecologies that provide much more dynamic cultural and rhetorical relations than a

classroom could foster better learning outcomes in which writers come to understand multiple audience expectations and conflicts through engaging with audiences beyond the classroom. As my study shows, writers are already engaging in this rhetorical and writing complexity, and perhaps our work as teachers is to call attention as articulated approaches for students. This project, then, not only contributes to our understandings of Asian Americans and their racial formation, but examining this often overlooked population's relationship to technology contributes to the field by providing valuable insights into the potential digital writing ecologies can have for both racial equity and new approaches to rhetoric and writing.

Future Research

From ethnographic works by Asian-American theorists like Angela Reyes and compositionists such as Shirley Brice Heath, I knew that participants' background context would be important for understanding writing practices and intentions. I did not expect the extent to which participants' offline lives would inform my understanding of community-public imaginaries as an essential aspect of Xanga as a writing ecology. Participants' home and public experiences not only shape their writing but, also, their desire to simultaneously seek and construct accepting community and publics online. Comprehending this data provided me the initial insights for developing the framework for the rest of my dissertation. As chapters four through six illustrate, reading data through and with a community-public lens offers a richer understanding of racial identities and positions, showing racial identities as a recursive and continuous relationship between the individual writer and her writing environment where community and public imaginaries significantly inform these developments. Ultimately, this study

illustrates race emerging from relational power dynamics, constant negotiations between self and others, and the friction between micro and macro levels of cultural/social engagements.

While I did not anticipate data on community and the public, I did expect issues on gender and sexuality to inform my analysis. But these vague expectations were also challenged as I observed extensively skewed gender dynamics within the community valuing men's writing and perspectives. A good majority of the men in the community asserted a masculine identity at the cost of reinscribing Asian fetishes aimed toward the women on the site and, at times, in order to distance themselves from the feminized Asian male stereotype: the operating logic being if they, too, can inhabit the gaze, then they would be able to take themselves out of being objectified and aligned with a feminine and, therefore, less powerful cultural position. Such masculine performances illustrate white, masculine ideology and its part in producing "Asian" as a macro level of race. This ideology not only goes largely unexamined by members, but it seems actively promoted in too many instances. I discovered a few members (utoppia and Angeline) who challenged this ideology within the community, but the pervasive issues problematizing gender difference and alternative gender/sexual identities remains an incomplete area of research for me. In hindsight and perhaps for a future project, I would like to further investigate this issue as it relates to Asian Americans.

I was surprised by participants' complex constructions and collapse of popular culture/media and the public examined in chapter five. While I knew that writers often included pop references in their writing, it did not occur to me to consider pop culture's relationship to the public until data pointed me in this direction. Working through such

data allowed me to see how pop culture mediates notions of the public to the public, further suggesting the importance of pop culture's role in constructing sanctioned, public identities. Too often, these public figures are imagined as white and male because, in part, these are the images produced and circulated in pop culture. The importance of technologies for affording and representing public and semi-public sites and identities for marginal populations is a critical subject of examination because what and who constitutes the public shapes our understanding of power: who gets to represent and who gets represented are issues of power grounded in the politics of representation (Ono and Pham). In addition, understandings of power manifest materially. When we consider who can represent America, for example, we also engage in racial practices including and excluding certain people as political figures representing "our" values and interests. Imagined as foreigners or inassimilable, Asian Americans face difficulties in being accepted as part of the political scene. As this study shows, the Internet can help to alleviate popular and stereotypical representations of Asian Americans by providing culturally mediating tools to Asian Americans so that they produce and circulate narratives from an Asian-American perspective (Alex; Sonlay). I return to uttopia's words in light of this: "it comes back to people wanting to be heard" (Instant Messaging Interview 02/25/2011). If nothing else, social networking sites like Xanga provide Asian Americans a space to express themselves with others who share in their experiences. Being acknowledged as and by community may be one of the most important moves toward political mobilization. As Geoff and so many other participants express, "we realize we're not alone in thinking a certain way." Collective experiences can become

cultural movements, but knowing what constitutes shared experiences can be organized by social network sites like Xanga.

Because SNSs such as Xanga play a central role in affording writers opportunities to develop an Asian-American community based on shared experiences, they also highlight the importance of online communities for providing marginal populations a place away from the dominant gaze. Reflecting on technology's role in affording simultaneous "safe zones" and "subaltern counterpublics" to participants in this study indicates a need in the field to revisit the intersection of writing and race in new ways (Pratt; Fraser). That is, comprehensive ethnographic approaches for research on race and technology remain lacking in our field, and even less (if any) ethnographic work examining Asian Americans' relationship to technology exists. While I hope this project helps to remedy this lack, I also see it as the beginning for addressing many other concerns and questions the study has raised for me. For example, I wonder what I would find by employing this research to a different online or even offline community. Would community and the public remain central imaginaries to writers? As I strived to do in this project, such future research would require a responsibility to understanding the personal and collective history of any group.

Chapter six is by no means the end to this work. Rather, concluding chapter six has challenged me to consider what critical production means in light of racial formation. Although participants in chapter six indicate the success of process narratives for modeling alternative ways of being Asian *and* American, can we as a field and culture shift epistemologies of race through language practices, thereby fostering more equity? How do marginal populations use new technology to access or create publics? These

questions, for me, are most relevant in pedagogical contexts such as teacher training and classroom practices. While my own desire to understand race informs much of this research, the potential for how this kind of work can contribute to teaching practices factors just as much into my own motivations as a researcher. Ultimately, my work on race and technology will find its way into my own teaching and, hopefully, into the consideration of other teachers' pedagogy; current writing technologies' role in maintaining "the status quo" in racial oppression and violence (Richardson) is too important an issue for the field to overlook and this study generated inquiry into how my findings can be translated into a classroom site of research: How can we consider technology for constructing "safe zones" for our own classrooms? What do community and the public mean for our various students? Do students employ these imaginaries in their writing in ways we have overlooked? If not, how might introducing these imaginaries into the classroom help students produce writing that could challenge them to think about the complexity and politics of identity as an ethos of belonging and exclusion? This list is by no means exhaustive, yet such questions represent potential beginnings for my future research and discoveries.

My Last Words on/for Participants

I wanted to end this project with a reflection on participants because this research would be impossible if not for their generosity with their time and thoughts. This project was always meant for them and the broader Asian-American collective (and I include myself in this), because it gives them voice in an academic setting that may not be always possible. As I come to the end of this study, I often think of Chris. I was fortunate

enough to interview him early on in my process because his stories inspired me to continue writing and working even when this work seemed unmanageable:

> Me: You talked about […] this generational difference—there's this generational gap at the beginning of the interview. […] And you talk a little bit about that, like you are different person in the home than you are outside of the house, so there's this difference between like your home culture, and maybe the culture beyond your home. Do you see this as an issue for other Asian Americans?
> Chris: Definitely. Definitely. I'm probably not the only one, but I'm probably one of the only few that decided to vocalize it as much as I do. There's probably a bunch of like… everyone has a different outsource, not outsource, output of how they show their feelings, how they get everything out. Xanga was my outlet. Talking was my outlet. Other people, they have different outlets. They have… drugs. They have alcohol. They have… different means of… anything. Videogames. Something. They find a way to get it out, and ah… and they vocalize it… Some of them just keep that within them until they die. And… literally, some people I've known have killed themselves because they couldn't find a balance between the two.
> Me: Wow…
> Chris: Yeah, because it was, it was strange to them, because they wanted to have an output, they wanted to be normal. In the end, they couldn't find that balance because at home they want... they, they were supposed to become someone else. And they just couldn't deal with it anymore. They become someone out in society and they become someone at home, and they couldn't handle it, and they just off themselves.
> Me: You think this is, um… this experience of having to negotiate these two cultures [that] can cause negative consequences?
> Chris: Oh yeah. It's… a very big identity crisis, within oneself, because that's what led to my depression and anxiety, because I, I couldn't find ahh… I, I didn't know who I was, and of course,… maybe because it was my hormones, whatever,… that was the most important thing for me to find out at that time. I was just lost. I needed to find out who I wanted to be, who [I was] supposed to be.

This particular exchange haunted my study, constantly reminding me of the psychological costs exacted by a racial environment in which we are all responsible for maintaining (hooks 14). As Ono and Pham argue, entrenched myths about the Other perpetuate mass "psychological trauma" among those constantly objectified and represented as foreigners (5). Compounded by a difficult/different home life, many

Asian Americans like Chris end up feeling "lost." Although Chris was able to use Xanga as an "outlet" for finding himself, he suggests some "couldn't handle it." While I am aware of mental ailments particular to Asian Americans' "identity crisis" documented in multiple psychological studies (Hwang and Goto; Uba), Chris's narrative resonates more profoundly for me perhaps because I came to know Chris as a person, thereby humanizing the loss of his friends as much as the loss of potential voices from this community. Impacting home dynamics and lives may be beyond my abilities as a scholar, but as a compositionist I strongly believe that I and other teachers can address the racial inequities perpetuated by language practices, circulating stereotypes, and the lack of empowering Asian-American representations, amounting to what Larry Gross calls "symbolic violence." Ultimately, understanding that writing is a site of power relations through which identity representations foster or challenge the "status quo" allows us to engage with language practices for the aim of disrupting and transforming our raced environments.

I admit to still fumbling in my attempts to make sense of this moment with Chris. I find myself just as "lost" in finding the right words, the right way to make things right for him or for others possibly lost in this process. I find that my words, from a participant-researcher position, may not be the most appropriate response because there is no sense in the irresolvable event and knowledge that comes with death. Therefore, in taking a cue from utoppia, I end with my understanding that meaning can emerge from just listening to people wanting to be heard.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

SURVEY QUESTIONS

Dear Xanga member,

As mentioned in my message to you, this is a survey for the study, *Technologies of Racial Formations: Asian American Online Identities*. You are receiving this survey because you have signed and filled out a consent form that has informed me of your interest and permission in participating in this survey, which will be accompanied by a follow-up interview. Since this study is operating within a limited timeframe, I would greatly appreciate it if you can return your responses to me within one week of receiving this survey. If you have any questions regarding this survey, feel free to contact me (Linh Dich) at "phone number" or "email address." Thank you for your time and generosity. Carefully read the questions below and take as much time as you need to respond to them. There are no right or wrong answers. Most of the questions are general and can be open to your interpretations.

Questions Regarding Your Identity (please offer short responses, unless you feel you need to explain further):

1. Name/Username/Pseudonym (please circle one and then print your choice):
2. Gender:
3. Age:
4. Race:
5. Ethnicity:
6. Occupation:
7. Current Residence:

General Questions:

8. When did join Xanga?
9. Why did you join Xanga? Did you consider other social networking sites (like MySpace and Blogger)? If you have, explain why? If you have multiple social networks, please describe why you use multiple sites.
10. How often do you spend time on Xanga? For example, how many hours per week do you think you spend writing for Xanga and reading what other members write? (This can also include the work you do for vlogs (video blogs), music selections, and updating your profile.)
11. What motivates you to keep writing on Xanga?
12. How would you characterize or describe Xanga to a friend (who has not been exposed to Xanga)?

Questions regarding "Asian Diaspora" (you can skip this if you are not part of this blogring):

13. When did you join Asian Diaspora?
14. What were your reasons for joining? T
15. The following is the description for the blogring, Asian Diaspora:

> Asian North American culture has spanned the continent and become an accepted ethnicity in itself. As young adults growing up under the hyphenated title, whether it be Chinese-Canadian or Korean-American, many of us are still struggling to form our own identity between East and West. Come unravel your words, stories, experiences, humour, rantings or random ramblings with fellow yellows!

Given the blogring description above, in what ways do you see yourself and/or other members of this blogring respond to this description? Please explain.

Questions regarding race:

16. How would you define or describe the term, "Asian American"? What do you see as differences between Asian and Asian Americans?
17. What do you consider negative and positive representations of Asian Americans? Please offer specific examples if you can think of any.
18. In what specific ways do you see your race and/or ethnicity, whether Asian American or not, being written into or presented in your online profile and/or when you post your blogs?

APPENDIX B

MESSAGE FOR CONTACTING XANGA PARTICIPANTS

A message from Linh:

Dear Xanga Member,
My name is Linh Dich and I am a Xanga member (Linh_L) and a graduate student at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. I am currently working on a dissertation project that examines the ways Asian Americans are constructing their own identities on social networking sites, such as Xanga. As a participant and researcher who is interested in what actual users have to say about their own identities and representations and how they are creating an Asian American rhetoric with Internet technology, I would like to invite you to participate in a study that adds to this developing scholarship. (Please read the consent form that will be attached to the forthcoming email for a more comprehensive overview.) You are receiving this message because you are also a member of Xanga, you may have identified as 18 years of age or older, and you currently reside in the United States. Also, you may have self-identified as Asian and/or Asian American and/or write about ethnicity/race in your blogs. I would like to ask for your permission to use your digital production (this can include information on your profile page, your blogs, vlogs, pulses, ect.) and to possibly interview you for my dissertation study, *Technologies of Racial Formations: Asian American Online Identities*, and for future academic publications and presentations. You are in no way obligated to participate in any or all of this study, and there are no consequences for declining to participate in this study or opting out at any point of the research. I will not use your information from your profile page if I do not receive signed consent from you.

If you are interested in being part of this study, would like more information, or have any questions, please email me at --------. If you have any concerns and want to speak to my advisor, please contact Donna LeCourt at -------. By emailing me your interest to participate, I will reply to you with a consent form as an attached word document. (Unfortunately, Xanga does not have a file attachment function.) The consent form will offer you a detailed overview of the research, a fuller explanation of the study's purpose, the risk that may be involved, and my methods to ensure your anonymity if you wish to remain anonymous.

If you do not want to participate in the study or you feel that you do not meet the requirements to participate in this study, I would greatly appreciate it if you can email or message me your decision. This will let me know to discontinue future contact with you in regards to this study.

Again, please don't hesitate to email me with any questions or concerns you may have regarding this study.

Sincerely,
Linh Dich

PhD Candidate/ Writing Instructor
University of Massachusetts, Amherst

APPENDIX C

FULL LIST OF CATEGORIES FROM NVIVO

- Asian and Asian American Fetishes and Yellow Fever
- Being Heard or Accepted, Voice/Voicing
- Community
- Community, Public, and/or Other
- Cultural Distinctions or Conflations
- Diversity, Exposure to
- Empowering or Empowerment
- Ethnicity, direct responses
- Global reference, indirect
- History, Diasporic Experiences
- Idenity, Misc.
- Inside Information, Insiders
- Language, direct references; Language Issues
- Live Meetings, influences of
- Making Knowledge, learning stuff
- Nationality, direct responses
- Other Members, influences on participants and their writing
- Other Members, participants reading or reaction to posts
- Other Members, reading of profile
- Participants Nature
- Profile, name, reasons for, reactions from visitors
- Race and Class
- Race and Sexuality and/or Gender
- Race, Ethnicity, direct responses to
- Race, Ethnicity's influence on Writing
- Racism, Sexism, etc, experiences of
- Relationship between texts, images, or videos
- Relationship to other members
- Representations, Asians and Asian Americans in Popular Media
- Representations, Asians and Asian Americans, lack of
- Representations, Media
- Representations, Visual, Physical
- Representations, Asians and Asian Americans, Normal
- Representations, on Xanga
- Rhetorical Strategies, for getting more visitors, etc.
- Stereotypes, affirming
- Stereotypes, complicating
- Stereotypes, rejecting
- Support

- Technology, online sites,
- Technology, online, specific to Asians and Asian Americans
- Technology, specific to Xanga
- Technology, multimodal and visual
- Technology, networking functions
- Technology, self
- Technology, textual
- Trope, intergenerational
- Trope, mixed
- Trope, tech-savvy, geek, and/or nerdy
- Trope, cultural struggles
- Use or Reading of Humor or Sarcasm
- Whiteness or FOB
- Writer, reader and audience relationship
- Writing (vlogging), motivations and reasons for
- Writing, on Xanga, benefits of
- Writing, versus other modalities (vlogging, static pictures)
- Writing, anonymity, fame, and/or authenticity
- Writing, comparing
- Writing, intentions
- Writing, participant' identity
- Writing, participant's influence on others
- Xanga and Demographics
- Xanga, comparing to other SNSs

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