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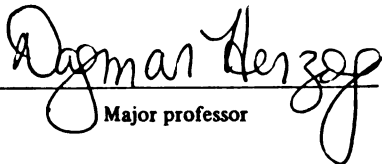
ASIAN PACIFIC ISLANDER LESBIAN AND BISEXUAL WOMEN
IN NORTH AMERICA: ACTIVISM AND POLITICS

presented by

Emi Minemura

has been accepted towards fulfillment
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Major professor

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ASIAN PACIFIC ISLANDER LESBIAN AND BISEXUAL WOMEN IN NORTH AMERICA:
ACTIVISM AND POLITICS

By

Emi Minemura

A THESIS

Submitted to
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ABSTRACT

ASIAN PACIFIC ISLANDER LESBIAN AND BISEXUAL WOMEN IN NORTH AMERICA: ACTIVISM AND POLITICS

By

Emi Minemura

This thesis deals with activism of Asian Pacific Islander (API) lesbian and bisexual women that emerged in the 1970s. Particularly it focuses on historical, social, and psychological backgrounds of the emergence and politics around which activism has developed.

As a research for this project, oral and written interviews with nine API lesbian or bisexual women were conducted. In addition, related literature was reviewed.

The research revealed that API lesbian and bisexual women activism has adopted identity politics; their specific experience of oppression that mainly stems from their multiple identities necessitates the adoption of the politics. However, as the activism progresses, it has also become apparent that the politics has a limitation that produces a weakness of the activism. The dilemma between the necessity and the limitation of the identity politics is an issue that they need to tackle today and in the future.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to the women who graciously agreed to talk to me about their experiences, feelings and activism as Asian Pacific Islander lesbian or bisexual women. This project would have never been realized without their cooperation. Among those who deserve special recognition are Alice Hom, who benevolently gave me precious and invaluable information and resources, and Asian Pacifica Lesbian and Bisexual Network, Los Angeles Asian Pacific Islander Sisters and Khush that helped me find interviewees among their members.

I wish to thank Dr. Dagmar Herzog, my mentor, for her insightful suggestions and instruction. I am grateful as well for the helpful advice and cooperation of Dr. Victor Jew, my committee member. The good-hearted assistance given to me by Kathy Dunbar, who helped me improve the language, is also deeply appreciated. In addition, I am thankful to Dr. Peter Levine, my advisor, for giving me kind guidance for the two years of my academic life at Michigan State University.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents, family and friends for supporting me. It was their encouragement that made me go through my short, but meaningful stay in the United States.

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INTRODUCTION

In the 1970s and 80s, Asian Pacific Islander (API) gays, lesbians and bisexuals began to organize themselves in North America. In the beginning, they appeared in cities along the coasts, such as San Francisco, Los Angeles and New York. Now in the mid 1990s, as a result of twenty years of evolution, organizations and support groups can be found in cities across North America, including Washington D.C., Denver, Dallas, Chicago, Seattle and Toronto. Literature and other works by and/or about gay API people also began to emerge and developed during the same period. Karin Aguilar-San Juan, who joined in community works in the mid-1980s, found that the manifest growth of activities and networks among the queer people of API descent was practically a 'movement.'¹

This thesis examines the activism of API lesbians and bisexual women. Why and how did the 'movement' emerge? What are the central issues around which the activism has developed? How can the activism be characterized? Particularly, what kind of politics does the activism adopt and how does it work?

Research for this thesis consisted of oral and written interviews

¹Karin Aguilar-San Juan, "Landmarks in Literature by Asian American Lesbians," *Signs* (Summer 1993), 937.

with 9 women who identify themselves, more or less, as "API lesbian/bisexual women."² All interviews were conducted in the spring of 1996. The women range in age from their early twenties to their early forties. Their ethnicities are Chinese, Chinese Burmese, Filipina, Japanese, Korean, Okinawan and Singaporean. All of them are college-educated. Four women are college students and the rest are employed. Most of them have participated in some kind of activities as "API lesbian/bisexual women," though they do not necessarily identify themselves as activists. They provided me with details of personal experiences, feelings, and opinions, as well as information about activities they have done in the past and/or are doing today.

The research pertaining to individual experiences and feelings was particularly significant to this project. Because of the identities they embrace, these women have specific experiences not only within general society, but also within the mainstream gay community and in their ethnic communities. These women are positioned at the intersection of race/ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation, and the uniqueness of their experience is the fundamental force that encouraged the emergence of the activism.

Due to the limitation of the interviews in number and variety³,

²All the names of the interviewees that appear in this thesis are pseudonyms.

³The demographic backgrounds of the interviewees were not balanced, especially in their age, class, nationality, and ethnicity. They were predominantly young, middle-class, and of East Asian descent. Most of them were raised in the United States. This was not a conscious choice but a result of the general recruit I did through e-mail networks of Asian Pacifica Lesbian and Bisexual Network, Los Angeles Asian Pacific

my argument depends to a large extent on literature by and/or about API lesbians and bisexual women that have been produced over the past twenty years. The materials include primary sources such as local newsletters, flyers, magazine and newspaper articles and anthologies of writings by the women. Also, some secondary sources have emerged since the late 1980s. The literature review provided me not only with additional information about the experiences and feelings of these women, but also with details of major events and incidents that concretely illustrate historical growth and difficulties the activism has experienced since its emergence.

Before beginning this thesis, there are a few issues that need to be addressed. First is the definition of "activism." What is activism and what is not? The answer seems to depend on each individual. Some of the women interviewed consider that activism consists of public, political activities such as marching, organizing protests and rallies, producing flyers and newsletters, and so on. Others define it as a more internal commitment to work for what you believe in. Respecting the diversity of the individual understandings of these women, as well as the others who I believe have their own opinions, I do not try to set a rigid definition of the term in this project. Therefore, the term activism herein is not limited only to political activities. It also includes various social and cultural activities that have been organized by people who identify themselves as API lesbians or bisexual women. This decision also reflect my strong agreement with the opinion of one

Islander Sisters and Khush (a group of South Asian gays, lesbians and bisexual people).

interviewee that merely "coming together [as API lesbians and bisexual women] is political.... Celebrating who we are is political because we are taught not to, we are taught to be ashamed of who we are...."⁴

Another issue which requires attention is the classification "Asian Pacific Islander," which was used by the U.S. Census Bureau in 1990.⁵ I decided to use it here because, in the process of the research, it turned out that many groups, organizations, and literature adopted the term. It is, however, very problematic. For one thing, there are over twenty distinctive peoples, nations, and cultures that are included under this one term. They are completely different from each other historically, culturally, racially, and linguistically, which makes plausibility of the usage of the term ambiguous. Also, people who are categorized as "API" do not necessarily feel comfortable with the generalization, due to individual historical, social and cultural backgrounds. Besides, as Sharon Lim-Hing, the editor of *The Very Inside: An Anthology of Writing by Asian and Pacific Islander Lesbian and Bisexual Women* points out, there is a danger of marginalization and tokenism.⁶ Groups such as Pacific Islanders are often marginalized under the term. These problems will be closely examined in Chapter IV and V.

In Chapter I, the emergence and development of activism among API lesbian and bisexual women will be traced within the context of: 1)

⁴Veronica. Oral interview, San Francisco, CA. March 29, 1996.

⁵Sharon Lim-Hing, introduction, Lim-Hing ed., *The Very Inside: An Anthology of Writing by Asian and Pacific Islander Lesbian and Bisexual Women* (Toronto, Canada: Sister Vision Press, 1994).

⁶Ibid.

Historical Backgrounds, 2) Organizations, 3) Literature, and 4) Scholarly Research. Chapter II deals with these women's experiences as the driving forces and central issues of activism examined in Chapter III. The third chapter also analyzes the political aspects of activism and its beneficial points. Chapter IV examines the difficulties and problems of activism. And finally, Chapter V explores reasons why such problems occur, considering negative aspects of the politics of activism.

CHAPTER I

EMERGENCE AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE ACTIVISM OF API GAY, LESBIAN AND BISEXUAL PEOPLE IN NORTH AMERICA

1) Historical Backgrounds

During the 1970s, API gay, lesbian, and bisexual communities began to appear in major cities of North America. There are several influential factors that preceded and contributed to this emergence. First, due to political, economical, and legal changes since the mid century, the population of APIs has dramatically increased in North America. For example, Hawai'i became the fiftieth state of the U.S. in 1959, which consequently brought many people from the islands to the U.S. mainland. Also, enormous number of immigrants came from Asian countries after the 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Reform Act removed discriminatory restrictions on them.⁷ The increase in the overall population naturally resulted in an increase in the numbers of

⁷Though the number of Asian Americans in 1965 was about 1 million, it increased to 5 million in 1985. In the percentage, it increased from less than 1% of the U.S. population in 1965 to 2% in 1985 (Ronald Takaki, *Strangers From a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans*, New York: Penguin Books, 1989, 420). As for Pacific Islanders, there are over 100,000 people today in California alone (Trinity A. Ordonez, "The Challenges Facing Asian and Pacific Islander Lesbian and Bisexual Women in the U.S.: Coming Out, Coming Together, Moving Forward," in *The Very Inside*, 386).

homosexual people of API descent.

In addition to the population increase, political consciousness among API gays, lesbians, and bisexuals was emerging. They witnessed decolonization movements around the world as well as the civil rights movement in the U.S. during the 1950s and 60s, both of which may have raised their racial/ethnic consciousness. In 1969, when the Stonewall Rebellion brought about the Gay Liberation Movement, the mainstream gay, lesbian, and bisexual community became more visible and politically active in the U.S. This visibility was further strengthened by the impact of the AIDS crisis during the 1980s, as AIDS was initially and unfortunately misunderstood as a 'gay disease.'⁸ Finally, especially concerning lesbian and bisexual women of API decent, the second wave of the women's liberation movement during the 1970s raised their consciousness as women. Encouraged by political activism that proudly accepted their individual identities and embraced their ethnicity/race, sexual orientation, and gender, API gays, lesbians and bisexuals began to practice politics and reach out to others who shared similar identities.

2) Organizations

It was not until in the late 1970s that API gays, lesbians, and bisexuals began organizing themselves. Many small groups were formed, especially on the West Coast. The Gay Asian Association, a social, support group at UC Berkeley was active in the late 1970s. In 1977, the

⁸See Urvashi Vaid, *Virtual Equality: The Mainstreaming of Gay and Lesbian Liberation* (New York: Anchor Books, 1995), 89.

Gay Asian Information Network was formed in San Francisco. Asian Women United, a support group consisting primarily of Asian American lesbians, was also formed there in 1978. The Association of Lesbian and Gay Asians (ALGA) was founded in 1981. This social, support group produced a newsletter and regularly worked with Asian/Pacific Lesbians and Gays (A/PLG), an organization in Los Angeles. The L.A. organization was also a social, support, and cultural group founded in the same year as ALGA. It produced a newsletter and had about 200 members on its mailing list by 1983.⁹

Despite the name of the group and the fact that it had been primarily organized for both Asian gays and lesbians, A/PLG membership predominantly consisted of gay men. Tension between the sexes seems to have manifested in the early years, as illustrated in an article that originally appeared in the A/PLG newsletter and was reprinted in the November 1982 issue of the ALGA newsletter. The article is an excerpt from Pam Hamanaka's paper that examines Asian American lesbians within the A/PLG organization, as well as in the larger society. Acknowledging a scarcity of female participants in the group, Hamanaka considers several reasons. For one thing, she points out, some lesbians were disappointed and left the organization when they found that they could not meet many other women in the predominantly male group. She suggests that this was because the women wanted "a ready-made sense of community" and that the expectation consequently "created a vicious cycle"; Asian lesbians who want to meet other women choose to leave a group with

⁹Michael J. Smith, *Colorful People and Places: A Resource Guide for Third World Lesbians and Gay Men ... and for White People Who Share Their Interests* (San Francisco: Quarterly, 1983).

limited female membership rather than make an effort to increase the number of women in that group.¹⁰ Other women may have left A/PLG because they simply felt uncomfortable among such an overwhelming number of the male members. Hamanaka also suggests that there were some women who felt it was a sexist atmosphere in which their interests were not fully supported. Later in 1981, the lesbians created Asian/Pacific Lesbians and Friends (A/PLF), a women-only social, cultural, and educational group. The number of members on the mailing list increased from about six to over seventy in five years.¹¹

On the East Coast, Boston Asian Gay Men and Lesbians (BAGMAL) was formed in 1979. It is a social, political, and cultural group that has participated in many rallies and panels since its formation. It began producing a newsletter in 1984. In 1988, the organization changed its name to Alliance of Massachusetts Asian Lesbians and Gay Men (AMALGM), which reflects its female members gaining more power and giving new

¹⁰"A/PLG and the Asian American Lesbian," contributed by Pam Hamanaka, *The Association of Lesbian and Gay Asians Newsletter* (November 1982), reprinted from *The Asian/Pacific Lesbians and Gays Newsletter*.

¹¹Pamela H., "Asian American Lesbians: An Emerging Voice in the Asian American Community," in Asian Women United of California eds., *Making Waves: An Anthology of Writings By and About Asian American Women* (Boston: Beacon, 1989), 287-8. The tension was not unique to A/PLG; it also seemed to exist in ALGA, which was a reason they reprinted Hamanaka's article in their newsletter. Introducing it, the editors of the ALGA newsletter state that "[t]his perspective [of Hamanaka] may be understood as the need for growth and understanding which can take place within ALGA" because "[t]here are many similarities between both organizations." The reprint seemed to reflect the group's effort to raise more consciousness about the issues of women within the membership (*The Association of Lesbian and Gay Asians Newsletter*, November 1982).

direction to the group.¹² In New York City, Asian Lesbians of the East Coast (ALOEC) was founded in 1983. It has also been politically active, producing a newsletter and a slide show as a research project on Asian lesbianism. In Canada, a social support group called Gay Asians of Toronto was formed in 1980.

During the late 1980s, more groups were founded. In San Francisco, the Asian Pacific Sisters (APS)¹³ was organized in 1988. It was a political, social, and support group that took over production of an API lesbian and bisexual women's newsletter, *The Phoenix Rising*, which had been produced by volunteers in the San Francisco Bay area since 1984. Gay Asian Pacific Alliance (GAPA) was also formed in the Bay area during the mid 1980s and produced a newsletter called *Lavender Godzilla*. DCALS, an Asian lesbian group in Washington D.C., was founded in 1988. The organizations formed during the 1980s have established an informal national network, sharing information, exchanging newsletters, and relaying information about each group's activities. For example, as early as January 1985, *The Phoenix Rising* carried an article about ALOEC in New York City entitled "Asian Sisters Continue Their Work on the East Coast."¹⁴

API gays, lesbians, and bisexuals also participated in more

¹²*The AMALGM newsletter: special issue* (summer 1990), 12.

¹³Later, during the first national Asian Pacific Lesbian Retreat (Santa Cruz, 1989), it changed its name to the Asian Pacifica Sisters because "it was felt that the term 'Pacifica' captured and concretely reflected all of the Pacific Island groupings." (Patti Chang, "Talking History: The Making of Asian/Pacifica Sisters," *The Phoenix Rising* #36, October 1990, 5.)

¹⁴*The Phoenix Rising* #5 (January 1985).

cause-oriented organizations, specifically HIV/AIDS support groups that began to emerge in the late 1980s. For example, the Asian AIDS Project was founded in 1987 in San Francisco. Also, GAPA started a project in 1989 called the GAPA Community HIV Project (GCHP), which later changed its name to Living Well Project. Finally, there was the Asian AIDS Task Force that sometimes provided *The Phoenix Rising* with information concerning HIV/AIDS in the Asian American community.

During the same period, more culturally-specific AIDS groups emerged within other gay communities of color. To explain the emergence of culturally-specific AIDS projects, including API's, Urvashi Vaid points to a lack of cultural/racial sensitivity within the mainstream AIDS organizations.¹⁵ People of color, particularly APIs, who are dealing with HIV/AIDS have a different set of problems that originate within their specific cultures. For example, one API lesbian activist has suggested that Asian people in general do not want to disclose familial problems to others or to seek help from others because they fear doing so would disgrace the family.¹⁶ She has also argued that, especially since AIDS can be transmitted via sexual contact and has been strongly associated with homosexuality, Asian people hesitate even to refer to it because of the taboo associated with talking about sex and homosexuality.¹⁷ Asian-specific organizations understand the unique situations that Asian people with HIV/AIDS face and, therefore, can

¹⁵Vaid, 89-90.

¹⁶Canyon Sam, "AIDS in the Asian Community: AIDS Comes Home, Part I," *The Phoenix Rising* #27 (March/April 1989), 6.

¹⁷Sam, "AIDS in the Asian Community: AIDS Comes Home, Part II," *The Phoenix Rising* #28 (May/June 1989), 6.

provide them with more culturally sensitive supports than the mainstream organizations do.

In addition to these AIDS groups, the Asian Women's Shelter was founded in San Francisco in 1988. This group provided culturally sensitive services for battered API women and children. One of the founders, Lia Shigemura, was a lesbian woman and there were reportedly many other openly lesbian and bisexual API women working within the group.¹⁸

Many API gay, lesbian, and bisexual organizations in North America have individually or collectively held and/or taken part in regional, national and international gatherings. For example, BALGAM participated in the 1979 National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights (MOW). The number of API participants in MOW is constantly increasing; there were over 40 APIs, including ALOEC, in 1987, and there were over 100 in 1993.¹⁹ Also, there were a few conferences for API lesbians, gays and bisexuals in the 1980s. The first conference for Asian Pacific lesbians and gay men in Southern California, "Breaking Silence, Beginning the Dialogue," was held in 1987 in Los Angeles, and the first North American conference for Asian lesbians and gay men, "Unity Among Asians," was organized in 1988 in Toronto.

¹⁸See Kolika O., "Celebrate New Beginnings," *The Phoenix Rising* #30 (September/October/November 1989), 3.

¹⁹Willy Wilkinson, "APL's at the March on Washington," *The Phoenix Rising* #20 (December/January 1987-88), 1; Susan Y.F. Chen "The March on Washington: APL&Bs Made It Extra Special," *The Phoenix Rising* #43 (Winter 1993-94), 5.

Also, there have been several retreats exclusively by and for API lesbians and bisexual women. The first Asian Pacific Lesbian West Coast Regional Retreat was held in Sonoma, California in 1987. Nearly 80 women participated from all over the nation. The number of participants doubled at the second retreat (Santa Cruz, California, 1993).²⁰ The first national Asian Pacific Lesbian Retreat, "Coming Together, Moving Forward," was organized in Santa Cruz in 1989. Over 140 women attended, not only from the U.S., but also from Canada and England.

The national retreat was sponsored by the Asian Pacific Lesbian Network (APLN)²¹. This nationwide coalition encompassed many groups and individuals and was formed in 1988 with a \$3,000 grant from the National March on Washington Office in order to organize the national retreat and form a national network of API lesbians and bisexual women.²² The formation of APLN shows that, by the late 1980s, there were "the numbers, energy, and necessity for such an organization" among API lesbian and bisexual women; witnessing the number of people at those gatherings from all over the nation, they found that, after two decades of evolution, "it was time to consolidate personal, informal networks of

²⁰See Willy Wilkinson, "On Pride, Identity and Empowerment: Retreat '87: A Weekend To Honor Ourselves," *The Phoenix Rising* #17 (June/July 1987), 1; Kathy L. Teo, "West Coast Retreat '93: APLN - Together Again," *The Phoenix Rising* #44 (Spring/Summer 1994), 5.

²¹APLN changed its name during the 1993 West Coast Retreat. Due to an appeal from bisexual women in the retreat, it became Asian Pacific Lesbian and Bisexual Network (APLBN) in order to include them. (*The Phoenix Rising* #44, Spring/Summer 1994, 7)

²²Judy Choy, "A/PL's Plan Retreat for '89," *The Phoenix Rising* #24 (September/October 1988), 1.

friends and newsletter exchanges into a more systematic approach".²³

3) Literature

The writings of API lesbian and bisexual women began to appear in a sphere of writings as early as 1972.²⁴ Throughout the 1970s, however, most of these women had not yet been able to have their books published even by small, feminist presses, except for Willyce Kim who published *Eating Artichokes* (Diana Press) and *Under the Rolling Sky* (Maude Gonne Press) both in 1976. Most other writers published their works in periodicals, such as local newsletters.

During the 1980s, API lesbian and bisexual writers had more success publishing their books. These writers include Barbara Noda (*Strawberries*, Shameless Hussy Press, 1980), Kitty Tsui (*The Words of A Woman Who Breathes Fire*, Sinister Press, 1983), Willyce Kim (*Dancer Dawkins and the California Kid*, Alyson Publications, 1985; *Dead Heat*, 1988), Merle Woo (*A Yellow Woman Speaks*, Radical Women, 1986), and Chea Villanueva (*Girl Friends*, Outlaw Press, 1987). Significantly, the first anthology specifically by API lesbian writers, *Between the Lines: An*

²³Alice Yee Hom, "Family Matters: A Historical Study of the Asian Pacific Lesbian Network," Master's thesis, UCLA, 1992, 8.

²⁴Here I will limit my argument to female writers due to the scarcity of published API gay men's writings. However, it does not mean that there are no gay writers of API descent. According to Ming-Yuen S. Ma, most of the writers have published their works in local newsletters produced by API gay and lesbian groups such as *Lavender Godzilla* (GAPA newsletter). (Alice Y. Hom and Ming-Yuen S. Ma, "Premature Gestures: A Speculative Dialogue on Asian Pacific Islander Lesbian and Gay Writing," in Emmanuel S. Nelson ed., *Critical Essays: Gay and Lesbian Writers of Color*, New York: Hawarth Press, 1993, 28-30.)

Anthology by Pacific/Asian Lesbians of Santa Cruz, California (Dancing Bird Press, distributed by Her Books, 1987), was also published during this period though it was very limited in the number of contributors and copies in circulation. As for the API lesbian and bisexual women writers who could not get their own books published, many of their works appear in anthologies of "women/lesbians of color" or "Asian Pacific Islander women."²⁵ Also, as in the 1970s, API lesbian and bisexual literature, including poetry, continued to be printed in local newsletters such as *The Phoenix Rising*.

In the early 1990s, the number of API women writers and their works steadily increased: Chea Villanueva published *The Chinagirls* (Lezzies on the Move Publications, 1991); Tamai Kobayashi and Mona Oikawa published *All Names Spoken* (Sister Vision, 1992), a collection of their poetry and prose; and Kitty Tsui wrote *Breathless: Erotica* (Firebrand Books, 1996). Anthologies included *Piece of My Heart: Lesbian of Color Anthology* (Sister Vision, 1992), *Witness Aloud: Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Asian/Pacific American Writing* (Asian American Writers' Workshop, 1993), and *The Very Inside: An Anthology of Writing by Lesbian and Bisexual Asian and Pacific Islander Women* (Sister Vision, 1994). As the subtitles show, there were quite a few collections of writings specifically by lesbian and bisexual women of API descent published in the early 1990s.

²⁵For example; *Unbound Feet: A Collective of Chinese American Writers* (Isthmus, 1981); *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (Persephone Press, 1983); *Without Ceremony* (IKON Journal #9, 1988); *The Forbidden Stitch* (CALYX Books, 1989); and *Making Waves: An Anthology of Writings By and About Asian American Women* (Beacon, 1989).

During the 1970s and the 1980s, distribution of this type of literature was usually very limited in area and copies in circulation. There were few major publishers who were willing to publish works by gays, lesbians and bisexuals of color, much less works by API lesbian and bisexual women. Unfortunately, this is still true in the 1990s. In 1991, Chea Villanueva self-published her second book, *Chinagirls*, as she was not able to find a publishing company. Margaret Wu reported that, in a panel discussion of gay and lesbian writers entitled "Who Gets Published and Why" (San Francisco, October 1992), Villanueva recalled the difficulties she faced when publishing. For example, she met a publisher who "suggested 'putting more white women' into the story about African-American, Latina/Chicana and Asian gang members." Also, there was a feminist bookstore which refused to carry the book "because [the store] was 'offended' by the book's sexual content, even though the store did and still does carry Pat Califia's books and other 'controversial' books about sex."²⁶ Because of such race/ethnicity-biased attitudes prevalent in the publishing business, most API lesbians and bisexuals have no other choice but to publish their works by themselves or by small feminist publishers, where distribution is rarely adequate.

Nevertheless, works by API lesbian and bisexual writers have been read by many other API women in North America. This is because of the existence of personal networks and friendships that were expanding while the quantity of available literature increased. API women developed a

²⁶Margaret Wu, "Who Gets Published and Why: Writers of Color Discuss the Politics of Publishing and How Their Works Affect Their Communities," *The Phoenix Rising* #41 (Winter 1992), 7.

process of delivering the materials across the nation and, consequently, encouraged the growth of writing activities. The literary evolution of API lesbian and bisexual women has been thus supported by their social evolution; without the personal networks among API lesbian and bisexual women and their communities, most API literature would remain unknown, even among those who were eager to read it.²⁷

Conversely, API lesbian and bisexual writings helped to reinforce the community as well. As with local newsletters such as *The Phoenix Rising* and *Lavender Godzilla*, books distributed through the network seemed to have a considerable impact on the readers. Kitty Tsui, a pioneering lesbian writer and bodybuilder of API descent, describes an incident she experienced at the 1987 West Coast Regional Retreat:

My book, The Words Of A Woman Who Breathes Fire...got a great reception and the first 1,000 copies sold out in six months.... After [promoting the book across the nation by myself], I experienced a long period of self-doubt. Was anyone out there buying my book and reading the words?... Was anyone affected by my words or was I just talking and writing to myself?

At the retreat women from all over the country came up to me and told me how much my work has touched them and affected their lives; that they've come to my readings and performances and have been moved to action and to tears; that my book is important and necessary. One woman told me she knew many women at the retreat who have my picture on their refrigerators....

It meant a lot to get this kind of feedback and to know that I am not just talking and writing to myself....²⁸

The retreat participants' reaction suggests that, for the readers, Tsui and her book worked as rare role models. Moreover, the readers seemed

²⁷Hom and Ma, 26.

²⁸Kitty Tsui, "An Open Letter to All of the Retreat Participants," *The Phoenix Rising* #17 (June/July 1987), 4-5.

to have felt a sense of community with the other API lesbian, that is the author herself. Reading her words may have been a precious, encouraging experience for women who did not have many other people around with whom they could share their feelings as API lesbians or bisexual women. Thus, while the literary evolution of API lesbian and bisexual women has been supported by their social evolution of organizing and networking, the literature has also supported and encouraged the community building.

4) Scholarly Research

In addition to literature, scholarly research by and/or about API gays, lesbians, and bisexuals has emerged since the late 1980s, including psychological, psychotherapeutic, sociological and literary studies. Research has been published not only in API gay and lesbian anthologies, but also in journals and other academic materials, often under the name of "lesbians and gay men of color."²⁹ Several factors may have contributed to the scholarly attention given to API gays,

²⁹For example; Connie S. Chan, "Issues of Identity Development Among Asian-American Lesbians and Gay Men" (*Journal of Counseling and Development*, September/October 1989); Beverly Greene "Ethnic-Minority Lesbians and Gay Men: Mental Health and Treatment Issues" (*Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, vol. 62, no. 2, 1994) and "Lesbian Women of Color: Triple Jeopardy" (Lillian Comas-Díaz and Beverly Greene eds., *Women of Color: Integrating Ethnic and Gender Identities in Psychotherapy*, The Guilford Press, 1994); Bob Tremble, Margaret Schneider and Carol Appathurai, "Growing Up Gay or Lesbian in a Multicultural Context" (*Journal of Homosexuality* 17, 1989); Karin Aguilar-San Juan, "Landmarks in Literature by Asian American Lesbians" (*Signs*, Summer 1993), and so on.

lesbians, and bisexuals, including the simultaneous growth of gay studies and Asian American studies in academia, as well as the impact of postmodernism on academia as a whole. Also, research may have been influenced by the overall increase in visibility of API gays, lesbians and bisexuals in the U.S.

As of the 1990s, API researchers have just begun to pay more attention to (homo)sexuality. In 1994, *Amerasia Journal*, a periodical published by the UCLA Asian American Studies Center, dealt with topics of sexuality in an entire issue entitled "Dimensions of Desire."³⁰ *Asian American Sexualities: Dimensions of the Gay & Lesbian Experience* has just been published in 1996.³¹ This work draws upon most of the articles in the above issue, as well as other related works on sexuality.

Dorothy Fujita Rony found the 1993 Association for Asian American studies conference at Cornell University historically notable because "[n]ot only did [they] have the usual scattering of papers concerning sexuality throughout the conference, but [they] also deliberately positioned sexuality as a central topic in a conference 'mega-session.'"³² Until recently, Fujita Rony argues, issues of sexuality had been "regularly shrouded in particular forms of silence"³³ or

³⁰UCLA Asian American Studies Center, *Amerasia Journal*, vol.20, no.1, 1994.

³¹Russell Leong ed., *Asian American Sexualities: Dimensions of the Gay & Lesbian Experience* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

³²Dorothy Fujita Rony, introduction of Part Three: Sexuality and Queer Studies, *Privileging Positions: The Sites of Asian American Studies*, eds. by Gary Y. Okihiro, Marilyn Alquizola, Dorothy Fujita Rony and K. Scott Wong (Washington: WSU Press, 1995), 245-6.

³³Ibid., 245.

"primarily ... couched through an overwhelmingly heterosexual framework"³⁴ within Asian American studies as well as in the Asian American community. The composition of participants in the sexuality session seems to show the legacy; they were relatively young, as were the contributors, who were mostly graduate students. In contrast, older scholars were in general absent from the forum. Referring to the age discrepancy apparent in the session, Fujita Rony points out a generational change under way due to "the arrival of a generation of Asian American studies people whose coming-of-age had been informed by the AIDS crisis, as well as by a greater 'acceptance' of gay and lesbian issues."³⁵

Since the 1970s, API gays, lesbians, and bisexuals have been affirming their existence and drawing more attention to their social, literary, and academic activities. In addition to the individuals discussed above, there are many more people involved in various, notable activities within the API gay, lesbian, and bisexual community.³⁶ What

³⁴Ibid., 247.

³⁵Ibid., 246.

³⁶For example: in 1992, Angie Fa, an out Chinese American lesbian, was the first queer person of color elected to the San Francisco School Board members (See Kim Compoc, "Phoenix Rising Speaks with Angie Fa," *The Phoenix Rising* #41, Winter 1992, 1 and 11); an independent filmmaker, Gregg Araki, who made films such as *three bewildered people in the night* (1987) and *The Living End* (1992), has been getting attention at film festivals as a talented figure in the "Queer New Wave" (See Kimberly Yutani, "Gregg Araki and the Queer New Wave," *Amerasia Journal*, vol.20, no.1, 1994, 85-91); Urvashi Vaid, a South Asian lesbian who is the author of *Virtual Equality*, was Public Information Director

driving forces that encouraged this development? For one thing, as argued at the beginning of this chapter, there were external factors such as the rise of various movements during the mid twentieth century. These movements helped API gays, lesbians, and bisexuals define their identities and encouraged them to organize. To account for over two decades of continued growth, API gay, lesbian and bisexual communities must also be supported by internal factors. In order to consider the internal forces, the next chapter will examine various experiences that API lesbians and bisexual women have had due to their specific, individual identities. Chapter III will address these experiences and other issues which became the driving forces influencing the evolution of API lesbian and bisexual activism.

and Executive Director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force from 1986 to 1992 (See Vaid, *Virtual Equality*).

CHAPTER II

EXPERIENCE OF API LESBIAN AND BISEXUAL WOMEN

There are various themes prevalent in the literature of API lesbian and bisexual women: these include individual identity issues involving gender, race/ethnicity, and sexual orientation; group themes of politics and activism; culturally internalized racism, sexism and homophobia; immigration and origins; eroticism; coming out; and cultural, family, and community identities. Literary forms also vary; there are essays, short stories, poetry, prose, scripts, conversations, interviews and visual arts. Despite the variety of forms, however, the content of these writings can be primarily characterized as biographical; most API lesbian and bisexual authors share their own memories, past experiences, present situations, and personal feelings.

The experiences that appear in the texts stem from the authors' multiple ethnicity/race, gender, sexual identities. In combination, these often conflicting identities generate various circumstances that consequently produce individually unique experiences among API lesbian and bisexual women. Although it is an impossible to generalize the biographical diversity of these experiences, there is a common thread of several recurring issues within API lesbian and bisexual literature.

This chapter reveals the content of various forms of literature and examines the specific experiences and feelings of API lesbian and

bisexual women that are often illustrated in their writings. Oral/written interviews will also be used to examine what it is like to be a lesbian or a bisexual woman of API descent in the United States. The first section explores individual experiences within the general ethnic/racial community. Specifically, we need to understand how the community, which is an invaluable support system for API people, deals with sexual orientation and shapes the experiences of API lesbian and bisexual women. The second section explores about the mainstream, predominantly white, lesbian and bisexual women's community. It examines how ethnicity affects API lesbian and bisexual women who are trying to find support within a group that focuses solely on their sexual orientation.

1) Ethnic/Racial Community

Because of problematic racial/ethnic factors prevalent on both the individual and institutional levels, growing up and living as a person of API descent in North America is no easy task. Some APIs experience blatant racism in the form of violence or harsh words against them. Many API-Americans who embrace multiple cultures may feel like outsiders; they experience subtle racism caused by a lack of cultural understanding within mainstream society. An interviewee who is a second generation Chinese American woman describes the predicament of being "somewhere in the middle" between Asian and American. "It is hard sometimes...because a lot of people, mostly white people, see me as totally Chinese, and [Asian people] think I'm just totally American."³⁷

³⁷Tracy, oral interview, Flint, Michigan, March 19, 1996.

However, racism is not always perpetuated by the other people; it can also be internalized. For example, Theresita Erfe Mejia Urian, a second generation Filipino American lesbian whose parents are both immigrants, recalls her childhood in Chicago: "I remember feeling that I did not fit in, that I did not belong and that I was not good enough. I remember wishing that I was not Filipino."³⁸ Another interviewee, who is Chinese Burmese American, is also aware of her own internalized racism:

[G]rowing up in school I was made to feel like [inferior] because I was Asian, because I wasn't white, because I didn't speak English perfectly.... It made me feel like why should I be speaking other languages except for English, like English is superior language and everything is settled around European history.... Everyone should want to be white, 6-feet tall, blond, blue-eyed and straight [under the circumstances].³⁹

Because of internalized racism, as well as the external prejudices and discrimination in mainstream society, people of API descent often feel insecure and powerless. The situation often reinforces the need for family and ethnic/racial community; the community and family become "a nurturing refuge" that gives people of API descent invaluable care and support needed for survival within American society.⁴⁰ Lesbian and bisexual women of API descent are no

³⁸Theresita Erfe Mejia Urian, "I Finally Was Home," *The Phoenix Rising* #31 (December/January 1989/90), 4.

³⁹Veronica, oral interview, San Francisco, California, March 29, 1996.

⁴⁰Nayan Shah, "Sexuality, Identity, and the Uses of History," in Rakesh Ratti ed., *A Lotus of Another Color: An Unfolding of the South Asian Gay and Lesbian Experience* (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1993), 118; This, of course, depends on individuals. One Filipina interviewee born and raised in L.A. recalls that she had "no consciousness of [her]"

exception. They also need familial and cultural support to cope with ethnic/racial discrimination.

Unfortunately, due to her sexual orientation, the ethnic community, including the family, does not always provide the API lesbian or bisexual woman with the support that she desperately needs. There are several reasons. First of all, the API community does not openly talk about sexuality, much less homosexuality.⁴¹ It is not regarded as a "proper" topic for discussion. For example, Dorothy, a second generation Korean American woman, recalls that her parents "discouraged any type of sexual expression."⁴² The strict taboo makes it difficult to address homosexuality, especially in general conversation.

The API community is no less homophobic or heterosexist than the other ethnic/racial community or mainstream society. APIs generally think that homosexuality is abnormal, believing that heterosexuality is the natural way of life. Most APIs also accept the negative stereotypes and false images attached to homosexuality. For example, gays and lesbians are often assumed to be transvestites or transsexuals, which are usually made fun of in Asian cultures. Homosexuality is also viewed as a rejection of procreation, and therefore equated to a rejection of family and lineage. Furthermore, the sexual aspect of homosexuality is often overemphasized, as if there were no emotional commitment in same-

ethnicity" until high school as there were many other children of color around her (Angela and Patty, oral interview, Los Angeles, California, March 22, 1996).

⁴¹Greene, "Lesbian Women of Color," 404; Rakesh Ratti, introduction, *A Lotus of Another Color*, 13.

⁴²Dorothy, written interview, New York City, NY, May 1, 1996.

sex relationships.

In addition to these stereotypes, API lesbian and bisexual women often encounter a misunderstanding that homosexuality is a Western phenomenon. One interviewee considers that this assumption comes from a lack of images of API lesbians on television.⁴³ Most lesbians portrayed in the media are white, and their numbers are extremely limited. This makes the existence of homosexual APIs unimaginable, leaving APIs to think that homosexuality is something foreign and alien to API cultures.

Tracy, a bisexual woman who is a second generation Chinese American, describes the total lack of homosexual awareness in API culture:

Before I came out to my brother, I was dropping him hints all over the place, like "I think that 80% of the world is bisexual, 10% straight and 10% gay." [But he did not notice that I was bisexual] because he did not have the concept that I could be.... He didn't pick up on it, whereas a lot of straight white family would have.... It happens all the time....⁴⁴

She considers that the lack of "the concept" comes from characteristics of Asian cultures, especially among women:

[In Asian cultures, women] are very, very close and often touching each other, and holding each other's hands down the streets.... If older [Asian] people see that, they don't think of that as anything, they don't recognize that as being a lesbian because...it is just normal, women to women closeness.... Whereas if they saw two men holding hands, they would probably think something. But two women, it is different. It is not as deviant.... [In Chinese culture] you see it all the time so it is not so big deal.⁴⁵

⁴³Veronica, oral interview, San Francisco, California, March 29, 1996.

⁴⁴Tracy, oral interview, Flint, Michigan, March 19, 1996.

⁴⁵Ibid.

They may know that lesbians exist, she adds, but "they don't think that it could happen in their backyard. They don't think that it could happen right in front of them."⁴⁶ The cultural closeness among women probably renders lesbian women more invisible than gay men in Asian society.

The "homosexuality is Western" assumption also tends to produce a condemnation of API gays, lesbians, and bisexuals. They are accused of assimilated with Western cultures and/or rejecting their original culture and its values. Nayan Shah, a South Asian gay man, examines how this mechanism works within the ethnic community:

South Asian heterosexuals have often denied the authenticity of queer-identified South Asians by labeling homosexual relationships a white disease.... These heterosexuals attempt to use the politics of race to condemn lesbians and gay men.... The conservative ideologies of heterosexual South Asians equate queer sexualities with an already well-defined yet adaptable arsenal of "Western evils" - divorce, drinking alcohol, eating meat, or drug abuse. Any unfavorable value is displaced onto a non-South Asian source.⁴⁷

He suggests that this assumption is a part of the racial ideologies of the ethnic minority. When the community faces a problematic phenomenon, the ethnic culture attributes responsibility for the occurrence to the Western culture. Thus Shah places the API assumption that "homosexuality is Western" within the context of racial tensions between APIs and the West.

Beverly Greene finds that the above assumption is also evident at a more familial level. She explains it in her psychotherapeutic study

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Shah, 119.

of lesbian women of color:

The quiet toleration observed in many ethnic minority families for a lesbian member is generally marked by denial and the need to view lesbian sexual orientations as something whose origins exist outside the culture. ...attributing lesbian sexual orientation to some outside source may in fact enable some families to accept a family member while removing themselves or that family member from any perceived sense of responsibility. Hence the ubiquitous notion that a lesbian sexual orientation is a Western or White man's disease that is "caught" or chosen.⁴⁸

One of the initial reactions of API parents to their son or daughter's coming out is a sense of guilt and responsibility; they are afraid that they might have done something wrong while raising the child.⁴⁹ Greene suggests that the "homosexuality is Western" assumption becomes a rationale for the family to alleviate the sense of responsibility. Consequently, she analyzes, it becomes easier to cope with the reality that a family member is gay. However, "quiet toleration" does not necessarily mean a true understanding or positive affirmation of the lesbian or bisexual family member.

There are other cultural obstacles faced by API lesbian and bisexual women face when coming out. First, sexism in the Asian cultures is blatant; women are not encouraged to affirm their gender, much less sexual, identity outside the patriarchal family structure. Also, API women often internalize the anti-homosexual feelings and attitudes prevailing in the community. Under such circumstances, it is

⁴⁸Greene, "Lesbian Women of Color," 413.

⁴⁹See Alice Hom, "Stories from the Homefront," *Amerasia Journal*, (vol. 20, no. 1, 1994), 23-6.

a difficult task for some to come out, even to themselves.⁵⁰ Besides, the family structure and reputation are usually highly regarded in many Asian cultures. A homosexual family member is considered a "shame," a disgrace to the family. It is no wonder that API lesbians are often unwilling to come out for fear of degrading the entire family.⁵¹

In addition, there is a language barrier between American born APIs and parents and/or other family members who are immigrants using English as a secondary language. For example, an U.S.-born lesbian who does not speak her parents' language may have a difficulty communicating what it is really like to be a lesbian. Even if she can speak the native language, communication may still be difficult because words such as 'lesbian' are not exactly translatable in most API languages.⁵²

All these factors demonstrate that coming out necessarily creates cultural difficulties for API lesbian and bisexual women. The difficulties are intensified when you consider the fact that, as discussed at the beginning of this section, the ethnic community is the largest support system for people of API descent. Unfortunately, the API community is often the least tolerant of homosexuality. Therefore API lesbian and bisexual women who come out risk losing their primary support system altogether. The loss of familial support and fear of

⁵⁰See H., 283-5.

⁵¹See Hom, "Stories from the Homefront," 26-8; Trinity Ordonez, "In Our Own Way," *Amerasia Journal* (vol.20, no.1, 1994), 142.

⁵²See Hom and Ma, 41; "Tita Talk: A Cross-Talk with Zelig Duvauchelle, J. Kehaulani Kauanui, Leolani M., Desiree Thompson," in Sharon Lim-Hing ed., *The Very Inside: An Anthology of Writing by Asian and Pacific Islander Lesbian and Bisexual Women* (Toronto: Sister Vision Press, 1994), 96-100.

rejection make coming out even more discouraging.⁵³

2) The Mainstream Lesbian and Bisexual Community

Seeking support that they rarely find in the ethnic community, much less in mainstream society, API lesbian and bisexual women often turn to the mainstream lesbian and bisexual women's community in order to affirm their sexual identity. However, API women are not necessarily embraced within these groups, either. Experiences of API lesbian and bisexual women, as well as those of other gays, lesbians, and bisexuals of color, reveal a lack of cultural sensitivity within the predominantly white gay community that "does not acknowledge that...ethnically distinct groups have a different life experience, different societal and familial influences, and different needs...."⁵⁴

One of the issues frequently addressed is marginalization. As the ethnic experiences discussed in the previous section suggest, API lesbian and bisexual women have issues concerning not only their sexual identities, but also their distinct racial/ethnic identities. However, racially/ethnically specific issues are rarely addressed and often neglected in the agendas of mainstream gay groups.

The *Miss Saigon* controversy in the spring of 1991 illustrates the marginalization of racial/ethnic issues in the mainstream gay community. The controversy occurred when the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund and the Lesbian and Gay Community Services Center decided to use

⁵³See, for example, Zoon Nguyen, "Life According to Zoon," *The Phoenix Rising* #22 (May/June 1988), 5; Margaret L. Wu, "A Conversation with Helen Zia," *The Phoenix Rising*, #42 (Spring 1993), 3.

⁵⁴Ratti, 14.

the racially and sexually problematic musical as a fund-raiser. Protest began with Asian Lesbians of the East Coast (ALOE) and Gay Asian and Pacific Islander Men of New York (GAPIMNY), then spread nationally among other racial/ethnic minority gay, lesbian and bisexual communities. Due to the critical atmosphere, the Community Services Center discarded the plan altogether. However, Lambda refused to cancel the event. Instead, the organization informed those who had bought tickets of the protest, and offered them a full refund if they chose not to attend. Lambda explained that the decision was made based on their concern that:

[c]anceling the Miss Saigon benefit...would seriously impair the organization's financial health and significantly harm its programs and operations, thus weakening its ability to fight discrimination - a result from which no one would benefit.⁵⁵

Tom Stoddard, Executive Director of Lambda, noted that they would lose about \$150,000, or 10 percent of their annual income, if they canceled.⁵⁶

The protesters criticized Lambda's decision. They argued that it allowed the perpetuation of racism and sexism in the gay community for money, pointing out the contradiction between Lambda's decision and their claim that "the organization opposes unfair discrimination of all kinds."⁵⁷ One of the protesters wrote:

I feel betrayed by Lambda because (1) by sponsoring this benefit Lambda communicates that Asians and Pacific Islanders aren't a

⁵⁵"Missing Saigon," *Outweek*, February 27, 1991, 6. Signed by Lambda Legal Defense.

⁵⁶Avril McDonald and Andrew Miller, "Despite Protests, Lambda Will Fund-Raise with Miss Saigon," *Outweek*, March 13, 1991, 14-5.

⁵⁷"Missing Saigon," 5.

legitimate part of the lesbian and gay community which they serve and (2) Lambda has framed their mistake in their favor by implying that the groups which oppose the *Miss Saigon* benefit are unsupportive of Lambda and therefore of the lesbian and gay community.⁵⁸

He found the Lambda rhetoric harmful to the gay community as a whole because it allowed for a division along racial/ethnic lines. He further suggested that Lambda rhetoric improperly shifted the issue from "how Lambda's mistake has alienated and disgusted [API] community and how Lambda should be accountable for this mistake" to "[w]hether or not the Asian and Pacific Islander community supports Lambda's efforts in general."⁵⁹ Audre Lorde, the late African American lesbian poet, was also one of the people who protested against Lambda's decision. She refused to accept the Liberty Award from Lambda as an expression of her feelings about the *Miss Saigon* controversy.⁶⁰

On the other hand, many people supported Lambda's decision. They felt that Lambda should not weaken itself by losing money; it was more important for the organization to keep working actively on gay issues. Lambda supporters criticized the protesters because they had "lost sight of who our common enemies are"⁶¹; protesters were accused of "infighting", "another example of various groups within the gay and lesbian community fighting one another instead of fighting those who are

⁵⁸Untitled, *Outweek*, March 13, 1991, 6. Signed by Scott Hirose.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰See Yoko Yoshikawa, "The Heat Is On Miss Saigon Coalition: Organizing Across Race and Sexuality," in Karin Aguilar-San Juan ed., *The State of Asian America: Activism and Resistance in the 1990s* (Boston: South End Press, 1994), 286.

⁶¹"Lambda Lament," *Outweek*, April 3, 1991, 7. Signed by James M. Emery.

most guilty of oppressing us."⁶² Lambda supporters insisted that it was the protesters who had a negative effect on the unity of the gay community and therefore on its strength to fight against homophobia in the larger society.⁶³

Lambda's decision and its supporters' opinions demonstrate how the issues of racism and sexism can be marginalized or neglected by the mainstream gay community. The underlying issue here is that the mainstream gay community concentrates only on gay issues. Consequently, racism and sexism are not addressed. This attitude within the mainstream gay community, which can be referred to single-issue politics, is not new at all. For example, the November 25, 1978 issue of *Gay Community News* printed this reader's response against a critical opinion about a lack of racial/ethnic diversity in Boston area gay and lesbian community:

The gay community should not align itself with other oppressed

⁶²"Anti-infighting," *Outweek*, April 3, 1991, 7. Signed by Eric Tsuchida.

⁶³ However, this is not to say that all the API gays and lesbians protested against Lambda. Some supported the organization's decision while acknowledging that, as an API person, the issues of anti-Asian racism are often ignored. On the other hand, it is also untrue to say that all of the Lambda staff members supported its decision. 7 members presented a statement that opposed the decision, "prepared to sustain staff lay-offs and salary cutbacks, should that have been necessary, to ensure that Lambda...survives by taking the only stance possible for an organization that represents lesbians and gay men of all colors and ethnic backgrounds." (Karin Aguilar-San Juan, "Gay Legal Group Charged with Racism and Sexism: Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund Finds Itself at the Center of a 'Sadly Divisive' Controversy," *Gay Community News*, March 25-April 1, 1991, 14.)

groups. For what purpose so that the movement can be co-opted to work for other causes and issues other than gay liberation?....

...[C]omment about the racial/ethnic composition of gay bars in Boston...is nothing but an expression of a mentality that attempts to kill two of our most precious freedoms: freedom of assembly and freedom of association.... Homosexuals should not align themselves with any other groups and should continue exercising their freedom to create gathering places to serve their own needs.⁶⁴

Urvashi Vaid, a former executive director of NGLTF, recalls meeting similar resistance while she held the position. When the organization engaged in "nongay" issues such as racism and sexism, some white members "complained that they supported NGLTF to work on gay rights, not on black civil rights and women's rights." They were obviously considering that "[t]hese were not 'our' issues, but were more appropriate for the NAACP or NOW."⁶⁵

Unconscious of the racial bias within so-called "gay issues," the mainstream gay community tends to avoid racial and gender issues. At the same time, it seems improbable that mainstream gays fail to notice the many people of color in the gay community who are directly affected by these issues. It shows that even homosexuals who are fighting against heterosexism and homophobia are not immune to other forms of discrimination. Homophobia within the ethnic community and racial/ethnic insensitivity within the gay community demonstrate how oppressed people can simultaneously be oppressors themselves.

In addition to marginalization, API lesbian and bisexual women must also deal with negative images and stereotypes within the lesbian

⁶⁴*Gay Community News*, November 25, 1978. Signed by Walter J. Phillips.

⁶⁵Vaid, 282-3.

and bisexual community, as well as in the ethnic community. API women often feel pressured to fulfill a stereotypical role: passive, quiet, obedient and exotic.⁶⁶ Alice Hom, who is a Chinese American woman, remembers this incident:

Once my Korean dyke friend and I were accosted by a white lesbian at Crystal Images, a Connecticut lesbian bar. We are minding our own business, watching the women dance and my vision is temporarily blacked by a woman with her hands in a prayer position, bowing and murmuring, "An-yo." We stare blankly at her and she asks if we understand Korean. "All Asians look alike," was the thought that raced through my mind.... She went on to say that she had some Asian friends and that they were "just the cutest things; small and dainty like China Dolls."⁶⁷

This episode illustrates not only the prevailing stereotype of East Asian women, but also cultural ignorance and insensitivity that amalgamates all Eastern cultures.

Another stereotype is that API women are necessarily heterosexual. Tracy recalls that people at a gay bar in Ann Arbor always reacted skeptically when they met her and other Asian gays and lesbians.⁶⁸ This reaction demonstrates the misconception that Asians are by definition straight. One reason for this inability to associate Asians with homosexuality is that images of Asians are only portrayed within a heterosexual context. For example, the popularity of *Miss Saigon* and the image of Madame Butterfly, who kills herself for the sake of love for a white man, are still prevalent.

In addition, the API lesbian and bisexual women often criticize

⁶⁶Greene, "Lesbian Women of Color," 405.

⁶⁷Alice Hom, "In the Mind of An/Other," in *The Very Inside*, 272.

⁶⁸Tracy, interview Flint, Michigan. March 19, 1996.

Eurocentrism within the mainstream lesbian community in North America.

Pramila, an Indian Canadian woman, remarks:

There are a lot of unspoken and unwritten laws in the lesbian society of how to dress and how to look. I think that most of us[lesbians of color] are not able to fit in a very clean-cut way into those categories: of having short hair, being white, you know, plaid shirts and boots. And if you are not conforming, if you don't fit into those laws and those definitions of how to dress and behave, then you are not so easily identified as lesbian.⁶⁹

The dominant, androgynous norms neglect API lesbian and bisexual women who dress in the other ways. Tracy reports the following experience concerning her hairstyle:

[So many times I was not considered as a queer in the queer community] because of being more feminine than they are or having long hair or being Asian. They don't think I could be until [they are given a sort of] symbol. When I cut my hair, it was just like automatic passport because they just saw it and [said], "Oh yeah, OK, it is believable now." It is pretty crazy, but it is true. It happens all the time...to people of color generally.⁷⁰

Eurocentrism can be found not only in the context of fashion, but also in how mainstream gays deal with issues such as coming out. One interviewee says that she feels a general atmosphere that forces everyone to come out everywhere. She considers this a very Western idea, much different from her perception, which is influenced by Chinese culture. She is not yet out to her parents but, she explains, it is

⁶⁹"Lesbians of Colour: Loving and Struggling," in Makeda Silvera ed., *Piece of My Heart: Lesbian of Color Anthology* (Toronto, Canada: Sister Vision Press, 1992), 163-4.

⁷⁰Tracy, oral interview, Flint, Michigan, March 19, 1996.

because she respects her parents. She does not want to come out in a "selfish" way as many white people do, that is "to tell that...this is the way I am and that's it."⁷¹

Eurocentrism in the lesbian community also contributes to the API assumption that "homosexuality is Western thing." The fact that there are other forms of same-sex relationships than those promoted by Western culture is rarely acknowledged by the mainstream gay community in North America; Western-style relationships are treated as ideal. In this sense, homosexuality is defined by and accepted as unique to Western culture. This belief is predominant in the mainstream gay community, as well as the API community.

⁷¹Ibid.

CHAPTER III

DRIVING FORCES, CENTRAL ISSUES, AND POLITICS OF ACTIVISM: IDENTITY AND POST-MODERNISM

Experiences within the ethnic community and the mainstream lesbian community illustrate the difficulty faced by API lesbian and bisexual women who attempt to find a place where their whole identities are affirmed. The ethnic community gives them support in terms of their ethnicity, but is not necessarily willing to accept their sexual preference, whereas the mainstream lesbian community affirms their sexual orientation, but remains insensitive to obvious cultural differences.

As a result of this situation, API lesbian and bisexual women are often unable to establish stable identities. Particularly due to the restrictive association of homosexuality with Western culture, a misconception perpetuated by the ethnic and Western communities, being an ethnic minority and being homosexual tend to be considered mutually exclusive. Unable to embrace both identities simultaneously, some API lesbian and bisexual women face "an absurd and infuriating reality" in which they feel forced to choose between being Asian/Pacific Islander and being homosexual, or worse, suppressing both identities.⁷²

⁷²Karin Aguilar-San Juan, "Exploding Myths, Creating Consciousness: Some First Steps Toward Pan Asian Unity," in *Piece of My Heart*, 192. Others

Circumstances render API lesbian and bisexual women invisible and silent in both the ethnic and gay communities, as well as in mainstream society. The number of out API lesbians is very limited, not surprising considering the discouraging factors discussed in the previous chapter. Within the minority and mainstream communities, the existence of API lesbian and bisexual women is unexpected, or even unimaginable, due to the assumption that "homosexuality is Western". Media also perpetuates the assumption by portraying Asian Pacific Islanders exclusively as heterosexual, and homosexuals as exclusively white. Unable to find role models, API lesbian and bisexual women often feel isolated and afraid to come out. The lack of visible women who are both Asian *and* homosexual can cause a woman who is to feel that she is the only homosexual woman of API descent in the world. Ann Yuri Uyeda recalls the fear she had had for a long time:

...I stayed in the closet for a long time, knowing the truth about my sexuality but never speaking it because I just didn't think there were any queer Asian Americans - while I knew gay men and lesbians, everyone was white. My fear was that I didn't know what it would be like to be an Asian lesbian.⁷³

The strong sense of isolation and invisibility is one of the major factors that motivate API lesbian and bisexual women to find each other. A desperate need to end the isolation produces energy to search

also refer to the situation. For example, Ordonez, "In Our Own Way," 139; Hom and Ma, 42; Greene, "Lesbian Women of Color," 406; Kaushalya Bannerji, "No Apologies," in *A Lotus of Another Color*, 60;

⁷³Ann Yuri Uyeda, "All At Once, All Together: One Asian American Lesbian's Account of the 1989 Asian Pacific Lesbian Network Retreat," in *The Very Inside*, 111.

for and build a community of their own. API lesbian and bisexual women need to create a comfortable and safe place where they can get support and understanding by making more friends who share similar experiences and feelings.

Reflecting the situation, social networking and support have become the primary goals of many API gay, lesbian and bisexual organizations. For example, the Mission Statement of the Los Angeles Asian Pacific Islander Sisters (LAAPIS), which was founded in 1993 succeeding Asian Pacific Lesbians and Friends (APLF)⁷⁴, states that the organization "seeks to provide an environment of support and affirmation for API/mixed heritage women who identify as lesbian, queer, bisexual, women loving women, or gay."⁷⁵ The organization has five committees, one of which is called the "support committee," designed to offering counseling and mentor programs for its members. Similarly, though as organized as LAAPIS, the Asian Pacific Lesbian Gay Bisexual Social Support Group was founded in Ann Arbor, Michigan in 1993 to provide support and friendship at the University of Michigan. Asian Pacific Sisters in the Davis/Sacramento area, California has also helps API lesbians, bisexual women and others who are questioning their sexuality. In addition, the fifth issue of *The Phoenix Rising* announced that its "goal is to provide an opportunity for Asian lesbians to network, communicate and share experiences with one another."⁷⁶

Many of the interviewees who have joined in API lesbian and

⁷⁴See Chapter I: 2) Organization.

⁷⁵Los Angeles Asian Pacific Islander Sisters (LAAPIS) Mission Statement, *LAAPIS newsletter* (vol.2, no.11, June 1995).

⁷⁶*The Phoenix Rising* #5 (January 1985).

bisexual activities feel that social networking and support needs are being met. For example, Veronica "felt [she] was coming home in a way" when she went to her first meeting of Asian Pacific Sisters in Davis. With support and understanding, members became "a kind of second family" to her.⁷⁷ Angela and Patty also found LAAPIS to be a "family," as the group provided many friends and support.⁷⁸ Karen mentions that she obtained "a sense of belonging" through social activities in Older Asian Sisters in Solidarity (OASIS), a support group in San Francisco for API lesbian and bisexual women over 35 years old.⁷⁹

The desire to break out of isolation have fueled the emergence of communities, organizations and newsletters for API lesbian and bisexual women. The social circles and networks created have provided API lesbian and bisexual women with friends and support as well as much needed understanding. Further, and more importantly, the creation of a social network and supportive environment for API lesbian and bisexual women has acknowledged and affirmed their multiple identities, which have long been denied or fragmented between race/ethnicity and sexuality. In 1980, Boston Asian Gay Men and Lesbians (BAGMAL) declares this integration of identities in its Statement of Intent:

The silence within, for example, the Chinese community about same sex love and relationships is as oppressive as the dominance of straight white culture. At the same time, many lesbian and gay people often seem to accept casually the racist cultural stereotypes of Asians in America. As men and women who are both

⁷⁷Veronica, oral interview, San Francisco, California, March 29, 1996.

⁷⁸Angela and Patty, oral interview, Los Angeles, California, March 22, 1996.

⁷⁹Karen, written interview, San Francisco, California, May 3, 1996.

Asian and gay, we do not believe we have to choose between our race and our sexuality.⁸⁰

Since the late 1980s, several API gay, lesbian, and bisexual retreats and gatherings have been held, which also serve as precious occasions for affirming multiple identities. Willy Wilkinson reports that the first West Coast Regional Retreat in 1987 "provided a rare and special opportunity for us to come together and acknowledge and affirm our identities as individuals and as a community within many communities."⁸¹ Thus, the social networks and gatherings have also become a healing and nurturing environment where fragmented and unstable identities can be integrated and confirmed. The establishment of networks was, therefore, empowering for API lesbian and bisexual women, both on an individual and a collective level.

Another motivation for unity and activism is the invisibility and silence API lesbian and bisexual women have experienced within both the ethnic and mainstream gay communities. In addition to constructing stable identities, API lesbian and bisexual women are trying to gain more strength and visibility as individuals and as a community. Asian/Pacifica Sisters (APS) in San Francisco strives to "create and promote a positive visible presence, provide role models, [and] increase visibility and voice...."⁸² Recently, API gays, lesbians, and bisexuals have begun to participate in various activities to increase awareness and promote visibility. For example, APS, Gay Asian Pacific Alliance

⁸⁰"The Statement of Intent for BAGMAL," *AMALGM newsletter: special issue* (Summer 1990), 4.

⁸¹Wilkinson, "On Pride, Identity and Empowerment," 1.

⁸²Asian/Pacifica Sisters Statement of Purpose, *The Phoenix Rising* #31 (December/January 1989/90), 8.

(GAPA), OASIS, and other individual API gays, lesbians, and bisexuals participated for the first time as homosexual people in the 1994 Chinese New Year Parade and the Japantown Cherry Blossom Festival Parade in San Francisco. Marching together, they strongly asserted that lesbians, bisexuals, and gay men were indeed a part of the Asian community. Other events, such as the National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights (MOW) and the Gay Games, where homosexual people gather from all over the nation, are opportunities to claim affirm the existence of gay Asian Pacific Islanders.

Literature by API lesbian and bisexual women also serves to increase visibility and raise a voice for gay APIs. The introduction to *Between the Lines: An Anthology by Pacific/Asian Lesbians of Santa Cruz, California* reads:

I use my pen and my paper to literally and visually create. It is my survival. And now Together, You and I write and gather writings by other Pacific/Asian Lesbians, to create an anthology, a community (sic). Though each individual work does not represent the whole, the existence of the collection --the visibility-- begins to define our community. Though we aren't always physically visible to each other, we come alive through words. We are breaking down the stereotype of the silent, the seen-but-not-heard or in the case of Pacific/Asian Lesbians, the unseen-and-unheard.⁸³

The editors consider that the collection of writings is itself the creation of a visible and vocal community of API lesbians.

⁸³C. Chung, A. Kim and A. K. Lemeschewsky eds., *Between the Lines: An Anthology by Pacific/Asian Lesbians of Santa Cruz, California* (Santa Cruz, CA: Dancing Bird P: Distributed by Her Books, 1987), 6.

API lesbian and bisexual women have different definitions of activism and a variety of motivations which lead them to participate within their community. Some want only to socialize with those who share similar feelings and experiences. Others are more conscious of the political importance of visibility as a group of gay APIs. Whatever the motivation, most of API lesbian and bisexual women seem to acknowledge the necessity of gathering in a safe place and establishing social ties among people who identify themselves as both Asian *and* homosexual. The communities and networks have affirmed the multiple identities of API lesbian and bisexual women, and also have become the foundation of various efforts to increase visibility and voice for a group previously believed to be non-existent.

Activism among API lesbian and bisexual women emerged and evolved around their distinctive identities. Refusing to be marginalized and silenced at the intersection of ethnicity/race, gender, and sexual orientation, API lesbian and bisexual women have been trying to create a place of their own without denying any of the aspects of their multiple identities. In other words, their activism has embraced identity politics.

Referring to Suzanne Pharr's definition, Urvashi Vaid argues that identity-based organizing "allows us to have visibility and collective power, to advance concerns that otherwise would never be recognized because of our marginalization within the dominant society."⁸⁴ Vaid supports the actions of API lesbian and bisexual women who have begun to break the silence and become visible, to demand to be heard and seen, by

⁸⁴Vaid, 286.

organizing themselves based on their identities. They have raised "concerns that otherwise would never be recognized," which in this case are the multiple oppressions they experience as APIs *and* gays *and* women.

Another benefit of identity politics can be examined in Pauline Marie Rosenau's analysis of "post-modern politics." Rosenau argues:

Post-modern political action is generally aimed at arousing aspirations, raising consciousness, exploring the politics of identity, and opening up opportunities for those who are marginal.... In so doing it employs a new style, a new political agenda, and a very different content. These post-modernists emphasize new conceptions of knowing and being, which make for a politics where more conscious attention is given to language and discourse.⁸⁵

The lesbian and bisexual community is a sexually marginalized group within a heterosexist central society. Likewise, the Asian/Pacific Islander community is a group racially/ethnically marginalized within a Eurocentric, central society. However, seen from a different perspective, these communities are not only 'the marginal.' What API lesbian and bisexual women expose through affirming their multiple identities is that even within each so-called 'marginal' community there exists a central society with its own margins. This new-found voice from the 'margin within the margin' calls into question the existing minority discourse about people of API descent, especially of women, as well as homosexuals; it reveals and challenges the heterosexual bias inherent in traditional discourse about API women, as well as the Eurocentric, or Western, bias inherent in traditional discourse about

⁸⁵Pauline Marie Rosenau, *Post-Modernism and The Social Science: Insights, Inroads, and Intrusions* (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton U P, 1992), 147.

homosexuality.

Another characteristic of post-modernism which impacts the identity-based politics of API lesbian and bisexual women is what Rosenau terms "anti-representationalism." Rosenau introduces the two schools of anti-representationalism that call into question the plausibility of accurate representation. The first school consists of the "skeptical post-modernists" who believe that mass representation is impossible. A second, more moderate, school of anti-representationalism is supported by the "affirmative post-modernists," who, unlike the skeptical post-modernists, do not deny the possibility of accurate representation, but wish to expand upon the limited, often stereotypical, classifications currently available. This aspect of "affirmative post-modernists" seems to be inherent in activism of API lesbian and bisexual women. The attitude calls for "positive reconstruction or replacement"⁸⁶ of current methods of the predicament faced by API lesbian and bisexual women; it criticizes the inadequacy of representation of API women and of homosexuals, acknowledging the dilemma faced by individuals who are both. In this sense, their activism contains an attempt to redefine and restructure the current representation that does not represent their multiple identities, insisting that homosexuality does not belong only to Western culture, and that API women are not necessarily heterosexual.

The adoption of the identity-based politics has been beneficial and positive to API lesbian and bisexual women. It has helped them

⁸⁶Ibid., 98.

become more visible and powerful, both individually and collectively. Moreover, it has raised awareness of specific issues that had previously been ignored, specifically the unique oppressions faced by API lesbian and bisexual women because of the multiplicity of their identities. However, a weakness of the activism has been also recognized since the late 1980s. This may be due to a diversity of "API lesbian and bisexual women." The next chapter addresses this problematic aspect of activism, mainly examining South Asian lesbians and the first national APL lesbian and bisexual retreat in 1989 in Santa Cruz, California.

CHAPTER IV

DIFFERENCE WITHIN: A BLIND SPOT OF ACTIVISM

Difference among those who are categorized as "Asian Pacific Islander lesbian and bisexual women" is an important aspect of the community. To accommodate such diversity the Asian Pacifica Sisters' basic goals re-established the following goals in 1989: "inclusiveness," "having respect for differences in ethnicity, age, class, etc.," and "having better cultural representation in the group."⁸⁷ Similarly, one of the aims of the Asian Pacifica Lesbian Network (APLN) is to "reflect the diversity within our API communities through outreach and education."⁸⁸ These goals indicate that respect for differences among themselves occupies a significant position on the agenda of the API lesbian and bisexual women's community.

The awareness of diversity, especially with regard to ethnicity/race, was addressed during the first Asian Pacific Lesbian West Coast Regional Retreat in 1987. The program from the retreat that reads, "[W]e are a multicultural, multi-colored group of women whose complex diversity is the basis of our strength; we have rich resources

⁸⁷"APS Update," *The Phoenix Rising* #27 (March/April 1989), 5.

⁸⁸Bay Area APLN, "Asian Pacifica Lesbian Network: April 25, 1993 March on Washington and 1994 Retreat," *The Phoenix Rising* #42 (Spring 1993), 2.

to gain invaluable knowledge from each other."⁸⁹ This excerpt shows that the organizers tried to acknowledge and celebrate diversity as a positive and beneficial aspect of the community. This attitude can be also found in activities at the retreat. For example, there was a slide show by Trinity Ordonia entitled "Uniting Ourselves and Bridging Our Differences."⁹⁰

On the other hand, however, difficulty in "bridging" the differences also became noticeable at the 1987 retreat. For example, despite the inclusive name and policy of the retreat, the participants were predominantly East Asian. Very few Pacific Islander and South Asian participants attended. Though many people felt included, several women pointed out the considerable lack of balance voiced their concern about difficulties they faced and the need to bond with a more diverse group of people.⁹¹

Two years later, at the first national retreat in 1989, diversity issues were further exposed. One of the apparent problems was, again, a lack of balance in the numbers of ethnic participants. The 150 participants were indeed diverse, but still predominantly U.S.-born East Asians, particularly Chinese and Japanese.⁹² Moreover, unbalanced representation was also evident in some of the activities performed at

⁸⁹Willy Wilkinson, "On Pride, Identity and Empowerment," *The Phoenix Rising* #17, 1.

⁹⁰Ibid.

⁹¹Ibid.

⁹²Alice Hom estimates the number of participants of each ethnicity as follows: Chinese 74, Japanese 34, Pilipinas 17, South Asian 10, Indonesian 10, Korean 9, native Hawaiian 5, Malaysian 3, Vietnamese 3, Singapore 2, Okinawan 2, and Guamanian 1 (Hom, "Family Matters," 11.).

the retreat.

People of South Asian descent turned out to be the most active and vocal group of participants who tried to raise a consciousness concerning this problematic tendency. They felt invisible and marginalized at the retreat; there was no South Asian person on the panel of the final plenary session, nor could they find any South Asian people or culture presented in a slide show entitled "Asian/Pacific Lesbians: Coming Out, Coming Together." Sharmeen Islam, one of the South Asian participants, recalls the feeling she had when she noticed the exclusion of South Asians in the show:

I felt awful. Here, in the midst of a group of women who have often found themselves excluded from the mainstream lesbian movement, in an environment in which I had expected to feel safe and validated, I was feeling invisible. Some of my South Asian sisters, feeling the same sense of exclusion, walked out of the auditorium at various points....⁹³

The next day, realizing a necessity to do something about the marginalization they experienced, 10 South Asian women who shared the Islam's feelings decided to get up on stage in the auditorium where everyone was gathered.⁹⁴ They spoke to the audience about their painful

⁹³Sharmeen Islam, "The Toughest Journey," in *A Lotus of Another Color*, 280-1.

⁹⁴It is important to note that there was a conflict in the minds of some of the South Asian women about whether they should act or not. They were afraid that speaking out would ruin the spirit of "coming together" at the retreat and therefore not be productive. In fact, as discussed later, there was criticism that "this was the wrong time and place" to speak out and that it "destroyed the spirit of solidarity." (Aruna, 5) However, Alice Hom finds the decision "a sign of the progress made in terms of Asian Pacific lesbians speaking their own minds and not waiting

experience. They affirmed their distinctive existence by naming their South Asian countries one by one. All the people in the auditorium repeated the names after the women.⁹⁵

V.K. Aruna remembers that a workshop held at the retreat entitled "Dynamics of Cross Racial Hostility: South Asian Perspective" was one of the key factors that drove the South Asian women, including herself, into the action. The participants discussed their feelings and shared experiences that illustrated how they had been marginalized within groups of API lesbian and bisexual women. Consequently:

[t]his workshop brought out into the open what many South Asians have felt for a long time but have not, necessarily, been able to articulate within racial or political contexts.... Hence, by the time of the slide show, many South Asians were acutely aware of the dynamics of cross-racial hostility playing themselves out in the retreat itself.⁹⁶

With a new awareness and consciousness gained through the workshop, the South Asians knew it was necessary to break the silence and include themselves among API lesbian and bisexual women.

Actually, the rise of South Asian lesbian, gay, and bisexual consciousness had begun in North America during the mid 1980s. The first newsletter for South Asian lesbian and bisexual women, *Anamika*, was published in New York in the spring of 1985. Though its production

to please others for the sake of community cohesion, suggesting a fact that the same fear of destroying the 'solidarity' had prevented people from acting in the 1987 retreat. (Hom, "Family Matters," 42.)

⁹⁵Ibid., 286-8; V.K. Aruna, "South Asian Lesbians Stop Process at APL Retreat," *The Phoenix Rising* #35 (August/September/October 1990), 4-5. Reprinted from *Shamakami*, June 1990.

⁹⁶Aruna, 5.

ended in 1987 due to a lack of staff and resources, it was a significant starting point for the activities among gay people of South Asian descent.⁹⁷ In January 1986, the first Trikon newsletter was produced in San Francisco, California. Originally started by two South Asian gay men, the group has expanded and still exists today as Trikone. Now it has branch organizations in Los Angeles (since November 1986), Chicago (since December 1986, later Sangat) and Atlanta (since November 1993). In addition to producing the newsletter⁹⁸, each branch has been active in events such as local Pride Parades and India Day Parades. Similar South Asian gay organizations were also formed in Canada. Khush: South Asian Lesbians and Gays of Toronto was founded in July, 1987. Two years later, it co-sponsored a conference called "Unity Among Asians" with Gay Asians Toronto. Also in Toronto, the South Asian AIDS Coalition was formed in 1989.⁹⁹

South Asian gay organizations continue to emerge in the 1990s. South Asian Gay Association (SAGA), later South Asian Lesbian and Gay Association (SALGA), was organized in New York (1991) and Philadelphia (1994). As well as Trikone, SALGA has been actively participating in local Pride Parades and India Day Parades, and also co-sponsored the Pride Utsav Conference in New York during the Stonewall 25 celebration in June 1994. About 80 South Asian people participated in the conference which was organized to provide forums for South Asian queers

⁹⁷Shandra Sheu, "About Shamakami," *The Phoenix Rising* #35 (August/September/October 1990), 4.

⁹⁸The Trikone newsletter has become a magazine since April 1993.

⁹⁹"Down the Years: A Datebook of the South Asian Lesbian and Gay Movement," *The Trikone Magazine* (vol.11, no.1, January 1996), 14-5.

not only in the U.S., but also in South Asian countries, Canada, and Britain.¹⁰⁰ As for literature, a newsletter for South Asian lesbian and bisexual women, *Shamakami*, was started in 1990. *SamiYoni*, a journal for South Asian lesbians, was founded in Toronto in March 1993 in Toronto. The same year, a collection of writings was published by South Asian queers titled *A Lotus of Another Color: An Unfolding of the South Asian Gay and Lesbian Experience*.

As the participants in the 1989 retreat did, South Asian gays, lesbians and bisexuals had been trying to affirm their unique identity through organized activities.¹⁰¹ The first issue of the Trikon newsletter announced to readers:

We want to tell other gay South Asians: YOU ARE NOT ALONE. There are many others just like you, who have had experiences just like yours, who have thoughts just like yours. And it is okay.

Through Trikon, we want to bring gay South Asians together. Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, Nepali, Tibetan, Bhutani - we all share a common heritage and a tremendous future. And we can start by giving each other a gift of tremendous value - proof of our existence.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰Vinay I. Varughese, "The Pride-Utsav Conference: South Asians Come Together at Stonewall 25," *The Trikon Magazine* (vol.9, no.4, October 1994), II.

¹⁰¹Obviously, the South Asian retreat participants considered themselves more or less as one distinctive segment of "Asian Pacific Islander lesbian and bisexual women." However, many activists outside the retreat do not necessarily identify themselves as "Asian Pacific Islander lesbians, gays, or bisexuals." These people resist the oversimplifying category and claim a distinct existence apart from it. This will be discussed in a later chapter.

¹⁰²Arvind Kumar and Suvir Das, "The First Editorial," *The Trikon*

Similarly, Neesha Dosanjh, the editor of *SamiYoni*, expressed her hope that the journal be "a forum for us as South Asian Dykes to communicate to each other, to get to know each other, and begin or continue to break down barriers and isolation amongst ourselves around issues which are very specific and unique to us as Lesbians...."¹⁰³

The South Asians were not the only group who criticized the lack of diversity at the 1989 retreat. Other underrepresented groups, such as Pacific Islanders and Canadian women, also declared their existence and unique identities. At the opening plenary session, for example, Julie Mau gave a speech about her experience as non-indigenous (Chinese) Hawaiian lesbian.¹⁰⁴ Canadian women formed a caucus in order not to "disappear into oblivion amidst a sea of Americans and indigenous people."¹⁰⁵

Retreat participants responded to these actions in various ways, "from tearful apologies to cold silence, firm support to sharp criticism."¹⁰⁶ According to Alice Hom, the organizers' reactions also varied. One of them acknowledged the responsibility of organizers to improve outreach efforts. In contrast, some became defensive, believing

Magazine (vol.11, no.1, January 1996), 10. Reprinted from *the Trikon newsletter*, January 1986.

¹⁰³Neesha Dosanjh, Editorial, *SamiYoni* (vol.1, no.1, March 1993), 2.

¹⁰⁴When Mau wrote the speech, she believed that she was "a full-blooded Paké (Chinese)." However, later in an essay based on the speech, she notes that she may be a mixed heritage Chinese Hawaiian. (Julie C. Mau, "Hoi, Try Listen...: A Personal Perspective," *The Phoenix Rising* #33 (April/May 1990), 8.)

¹⁰⁵C. Allyson Lee, "Thoughts and Impressions on the A/PLN Retreat," *The Phoenix Rising* #30 (September/October/November 1989), 4.

¹⁰⁶Aruna, 5.

they made the best possible effort to be inclusive. One organizer admitted that it had been very difficult to fully achieve diversity, due to limited resources.¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless, Hom suggests, most of them took the criticism positively, considering that the incidents made the retreat "an eye-opener to the differences among Asian Pacific lesbians."¹⁰⁸

It was "an eye-opener" in the sense that, at the retreat, the API lesbians and bisexual women began looking at themselves more critically, understanding the need for representation from different segments within the community. They began questioning the supposed diversity that they had been celebrating. A few months later, Willy Wilkinson wrote in *The Phoenix Rising*:

Whenever the issue of racism comes up, white women invariably say, "What about our issues? I'm a victim too." This way the focus is taken away from the issue at hand. When the issue of racism was raised at the retreat, I watched members of the dominant Asian American population respond by saying "What about our issues? We're oppressed too." Many of us have been unable to even acknowledge that we have work to do.¹⁰⁹

In the critical and defensive attitudes of some of the retreat participants towards the actions of the underrepresented groups, Wilkinson found a lack of awareness of the power imbalance within the community. She proceeds to ask her sisters, "particularly...those of us who are the majority, who are the most often included, who most easily fit into the 'Asian' category without having to do any explaining":

¹⁰⁷Hom, "Family Matters," 37-8.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., 42.

¹⁰⁹Willy Wilkinson, "Hey Girlfriends," *The Phoenix Rising* #31 (December/January 1989/90), 3.

South Asian women were the ones to educate us on what the term "South Asian" means, yet articles on the APLN retreat still gave a narrow definition of "South Asian." Do we know enough about Pacific Islanders and their struggles (i.e.: land rights) to call ourselves "Asian/Pacifica?" How well do we really know each other? When we talk about being more inclusive to these and other groups (including Southeast Asian, mixed heritage and other underrepresented groups), do we really know how to be accessible? Do we call it "outreach" or "networking?"¹¹⁰

Remarking that "[r]acism is not just a white disease," Wilkinson calls for a thorough self-examination of the API lesbian and bisexual community, specifically to understand how problematic race relations are working, not only outside, but within the community itself.

Looking at the issue of the diversity within the community, a blind spot in API lesbian and bisexual activism seems to be revealed. It is an internalization of the societal structure of margin and center. At the center are American-born East Asians, especially those of Chinese or Japanese descent. While their issues tend to be monolithically represented as *the* issues facing API lesbian and bisexual women, other groups, such as South Asians and Pacific Islanders, feel excluded and marginalized because their issues are not addressed even though they are officially included in the 'central' category.

This situation is ironic: claiming their marginalized status themselves within both the ethnic community and the mainstream lesbian community, API lesbians and bisexual women are also guilty of marginalizing various segments within their own community. The lack of representation and consequent rejection experienced by South Asians,

¹¹⁰Ibid.

Pacific Islanders, and others at the 1989 retreat prove that the same discrimination that API lesbian and bisexual women fight in mainstream society is practiced within their own community.

Unfortunately, upon examining the dynamics of the API lesbian and bisexual group, internal misrepresentation seems to be unavoidable. The final chapter examines the inevitability of this blind spot and explores a limitation of the identity politics, analyzing the nature of the category "API lesbian and bisexual women."

CHAPTER V

IDENTITY POLITICS AND A LIMITATION OF ACTIVISM

The category "Asian Pacific Islander lesbian and bisexual women" is problematic. For one thing, as suggested in the Introduction, the classification over-simplifies the diverse cultures, nations, and peoples that are supposed to be included. This is true even in the words, "Asian" and "Pacific Islander," both of which are frequently used, but not necessarily with consideration for differences among individual peoples and/or cultures.

Opposed to the inaccurate representations and culturally insensitive definitions imposed by the category of "API," some people are unwillingness to be identified by these terms. For example, Rakesh Ratti finds the word Asian "misleading" because South Asians tend to be mixed up with East Asians despite obvious cultural, racial, and linguistic differences between them. He considers the monolithic representation of "Asians" as "merely another form of ethnocentrism, an extension of the 'white' and 'other' dichotomy that once ignored the individuality of all minority groups."¹¹¹ As a sign of political consciousness, Ratti rejects the term Asian and embraces his own South Asian identity and culture: it means for him a resistance to the Eurocentric understanding of the world and history.

¹¹¹Ratti, 12.

Julie Mau is also aware of political implications in the usage of terms such as "Asian American," a classification that tends to ignore the uniqueness of her culture and identity as a mixed heritage Chinese Hawaiian. She points out a prevalent, but incorrect, assumption that "since Hawai'i is a state [of the U.S.], it must be just an extension of the continent and the dynamics that go on in the continent."¹¹²

Considering the history of Hawai'i, whose indigenous cultures are endangered because of loss of land, colonization, and U.S. imperialism, militarization, and tourism, she declares that it is "an insult" to be referred to as an "American."¹¹³ She also rejects the term Asian because it originated as a classification within the continental U.S. Mau points out that Hawaiians rarely use the term to describe people of "Asian" descent. Mau's awareness of her distinctive culture and the complicated history of the islands make her feel uncomfortable when she is carelessly categorized under the terms Asian and American.

In addition to the ambiguities present in ethnic/racial terms, words such as "homosexual," "lesbian," and "bisexual" can also be problematic. Lisa Kahaleole Chang Hall and J. Kehaulani Kauanui argue that "homosexuality" is not always an appropriate term to represent same-sex relationships of Pacific Islanders:

Pacific people from Aotearoa (New Zealand) to the Hawaiian Islands have shared a cosmology in which sexuality is an integral force of life - indeed the cause of the life of the universe - and not a separable category of behavior and existence. The discrete analytical categories of "homosexuality," and more fundamentally "sexuality" itself, are a colonial imposition which

¹¹²Mau, 8.

¹¹³Ibid.

only address the realities of a small part of the spectrum of Pacific people who have sexual and love relationships with members of their own sex.¹¹⁴

The existence of Pacific cultures that do not comprehend "homosexuality" as a separate lifestyle denies universality of the term, making it clear that the concept is just a product of the Western notion of (homo)sexuality. Therefore, they point out, when some Pacific people do not identify with the term "gay" or "lesbian," it is not necessarily because they want to remain in the closet; the reason might be that they attempt "to retain control over the meaning and interpretation of those same-sex desires and relationships and to retain a pre-colonial understanding of the world and one's place in it that is not divided by Christian and capitalist dualities of spirit and flesh, sacred and profane."¹¹⁵

The opinions above expose negative aspects inherent in both the individual terms and the category "API lesbian and bisexual women." They suggest how easily the terms can neglect various cultural, historical, and political complexities shared by individual groups that are categorized under the title "API lesbian and bisexual women." The women included in this category find that the category itself and the words in it are based on Western conceptions. Acknowledging that their peoples and cultures have always been subjected to the judgment and bias of the Western value system, API lesbian and bisexual women are beginning to recognize that the U.S. mentality permeated and influenced

¹¹⁴Lisa Kahaleole Chang Hall and J. Kehaulani Kauanui, "Same-Sex Sexuality in Pacific Literature," *Amerasia Journal* (vol. 20, no. 1, 1994), 76.

¹¹⁵Ibid., 77.

the usage of the terms in the category. By refusing to be categorized as API lesbian and bisexual women, individuals are rejecting the Eurocentric understanding of non-Western peoples and cultures.

One can also find divisive elements within the relationships of women categorized as API, which calls into question the category that lumps them together as one group of people. For example, a hierarchy has developed, especially in terms of ethnicity/race. Due to differences in race, there is a wide variance of complexions among "APIs." Based on skin tone, a hierarchy has developed among APIs, similar to that in the African American community. During the South Asian workshop at the 1989 retreat, for example, one of the panel presenters reportedly remarked that she noticed that the color of her skin was "a threat" to non-South Asian API lesbian and bisexual women.¹¹⁶ Nationality and region of origin are other factors that sometimes become divisive, which may be caused by historical relationships between the countries of Asia and the Pacific Islands. One interviewee remembered her father's concept of hierarchy between Southeast Asian people and East Asian people in his comment to his wife that she was "lucky to have married a Chinese man because she is mixed [of Chinese and Burmese] and that makes you less desirable."¹¹⁷ Such interracial and intraracial conflicts among "APIs" further demonstrates the Western bias of the category "API lesbian and bisexual women." Due to obvious differences in their backgrounds, it is impossible to assume that all "API lesbian and bisexual women" equally, spontaneously, and comfortably accept the

¹¹⁶Aruna, 5.

¹¹⁷Veronica, oral interview, San Francisco, CA, March 29, 1996.

category and/or others who are categorized under the same term. Though it may be true that they share some similarities, it is still a biased Western concept that brings them together as one group of people.

All these problematic factors demonstrate that the category of "API lesbian and bisexual women" inherently contains political dynamics which make it difficult to nurture a shared identity among such diverse people. Because the category is based on Western concepts, attitudes of API lesbian and bisexual women toward the category are often ambiguous, fragmented, and contradictory. Power struggles within the category occasionally become a source of confrontation, division, and marginalization within the group. Consequently, the group identity, which is based primarily on the categorization, is at best shaky; the identity becomes as fluid and ambiguous as the classification. The concept of "API lesbian/bisexual woman" is, therefore, unquestionably varied depending on each individual.

The fact that the group's identity is fluid and ambiguous partly explains why API lesbian and bisexual activism has the blind spot discussed in the previous chapter. The internal reproduction of a central and marginal structure within the group presents the dangerous possibility of fragmentation; people are not automatically identical and agreeable because they are identified within the same category, because each individual has a completely different set of needs depending on her cultural, political, historical, and social background. Also, the imbalanced power structures working within the group cause those who are relatively powerful to occupy the center of the group while those who lack power are pushed toward the margin.

The internal conflict, or blind spot, seems to be an inevitable by-product of "API lesbian and bisexual women" activism. To be exact, it stems from the adoption of identity politics because, as discussed, there is a conflict from the beginning as to what constitutes the group identity. This is a weakness of identity politics in general because no individual can be completely identical to another, especially in the case of "API lesbian and bisexual women." Agreeing with Suzanne Pharr's theory, Urvashi Vaid argues that "identity-based organizing cannot countenance the multiplicity of identities of which people are actually composed."¹¹⁸ She continues, quoting Pharr's words, that identity politics cannot "acknowledge that ... a similar imbalance of power ... exists within identity groups, as within the larger society."¹¹⁹ Similarly, Henry Louis Gates Jr. explains the situation in the context of the construction of minority discourse:

Inevitably the process of constructing a group identity, at the margins as at the very center, involves active exclusion and repudiation; self-identity requires the homogeneity of the self-identical. Ironically, then, the cultural mechanism of minority self-construction must replicate the mechanism responsible for rendering it marginal in the first place.¹²⁰

That is to say, to situate a certain identity at the center will eventually result in making the politics of the group monolithic and individualistic. Consequently, a clear picture of the fundamental power

¹¹⁸Vaid, 286.

¹¹⁹Ibid.

¹²⁰Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "African American Criticism," in Stephen Jay Greenblatt and Giles B. Gunn eds., *Redrawing the Boundaries: the Transformation of English and American Literary Studies* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1992), 312.

structure that has made their political action necessary will not be acquired. On the contrary, the structure will be unconsciously recreated within the group.

In the case of "API lesbian and bisexual women," where the group identity is deemed necessary for activism, the activists are unable to see that the basic power structure that caused their multiple oppressions is still working in the very act of asserting their identity. The women have mistakenly assumed that the identity represented by "API lesbian and bisexual women" is equally, or at least similarly, shared by all, despite the fact that individuals within the group are far from identical. By attempting to fight the structure by which they are marginalized, therefore, they are unconsciously reproducing that structure among themselves by excluding or marginalizing certain people within their own group. Hence, although the concept of a group identity served as a foundation for the activism, it has at the same time caused a weakness that limits activism.

API lesbian and bisexual activism has been severely limited due to its dependence on identity politics. API lesbian and bisexual women are a diverse group, and as long as activism is based on a single, collective identity, the reproduction of a margin-center structure could be endlessly repeated. Besides ethnic/racial tensions, another factor which remains to be addressed is class differentiation. One interviewee recognized the existence of classism within a group of "API lesbian and bisexual women" in San Francisco.¹²¹ Concern about class is also expressed by Hom and Ma, who suggest that, in both men's and women's

¹²¹Veronica, oral interview, San Francisco, CA, March 29, 1996.

cases, activities such as organizing and writing are predominantly done by students and upper and middle-class people who tend to have more money and time than working-class people.¹²² Under the circumstances, there is a danger of elitism; it may be easy, even if unintentional, to ignore concerns of working-class people and others.

¹²²Hom and Ma, 33-4.

CONCLUSION

The weakness that arises from identity politics seems to be destructive to political activism; the more divided people are, the weaker they will be. Some scholars acknowledge the fatal insufficiency of identity politics, and have already begun to search for alternatives. Chandra Talpade Mohanty offers a suggestion in the introduction to *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*. She is concerned that the term "Third World Women" is a problematic category that encompasses many diverse peoples, regions and cultures. In order to "recognize and analytically explore the links among the histories and struggles of third world women against racism, sexism, colonialism, imperialism and monopoly capital," she introduces an idea of "imagined community":

"Imagined" not because it is not "real" but because it suggests potential alliances and collaborations across divisive boundaries, and "community" because in spite of internal hierarchies within third world contexts, it nevertheless suggests a significant, deep commitment to what Benedict Anderson, in referring to the idea of the nation, calls "horizontal comradeship."

The idea of imagined community is useful because it leads us away from essentialist notions of third world feminist struggles, suggesting political rather than biological or cultural bases for alliance. Thus, it is not color or sex which constructs the ground for these struggles. Rather, it is the *way* we think about race, class, and gender - the political links we choose to make among and between struggles. Thus, potentially, women of all colors (including white women) can align themselves with and

participate in these imagined communities.¹²³

Mohanty finds a problem in the essentialism of Third World Women's alliance. To be based only on essential elements such as biology and culture limits a possibility of uniting beyond biological and cultural differences. Instead, she suggests political consciousness as a base: how they acknowledge race, sex and class relations around themselves.

Similarly, Urvashi Vaid finds identity politics problematic in that it prevents people with different identities from uniting across race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, or gender lines. Especially in terms of queer activism, she suggests adopting what she calls "Queer moral vision," instead of identity, as an alternative organizing theory. She explains that moral commitments arise from the experiences of queers as social outcasts and that morality can be defined by principles such as:

a commitment to honesty, demonstrated by the experience of coming out; a commitment to community, or a love that surpasses the definition of family and relationship we inherited from the heterosexual norm; and a commitment to joy, expressed in our affirmation of pleasure, both sexual and nonsexual.¹²⁴

She believes that "moral grounding will help us bridge identity-based differences and communicate better with each other and with straight America."¹²⁵

However, should identity politics be discarded altogether from

¹²³Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Introduction: Cartographies of Struggle: Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism," in Mohanty, Ann Russo and Lourdes Torres eds., *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana U P, 1991), 4.

¹²⁴Vaid, 380.

¹²⁵Ibid.

"API lesbians and bisexual women" activism? Taking into account the situations from which activism has originated, an ironic dilemma is revealed in terms of the role that identity politics plays in activism. On the one hand, dependence on a singular group identity has a fatal limitation; it cannot be a unifying theory as it necessitates new exclusions within the group. On the other hand, however, the limitation of identity politics does not deny the fact that "API lesbian and bisexual women" need to address specific oppressions they have experienced; they have to voice their own concerns because, as argued in the previous chapters, no one else will do it for them. Nor is it deniable that API lesbian and bisexual women need to establish relationships with other people who know and understand their feelings of isolation, hurt, and anger. As discussed in Chapter III, activism has been primarily emerged from a sense of isolation. This means that desire for community/unity has been one of the major, driving forces that encouraged them to find people with whom they share similar experiences. This dilemma, that is the tension between the merit and demerit of identity politics, is an issue that activists needs to tackle today and in the future. There seem to be no easy solutions and it will take time to find a new, satisfying strategy.

However, this is not the only struggle that API lesbian and bisexual women face. There is another simple, but probably more important, task that they need to accomplish; they must continue the work they began twenty years ago. Several interviewees were very conscious of the difficulty of this task. Activism requires a lot of time, money, and energy, all of which are hard to find when people are preoccupied with their daily lives. Also, in terms of organizing, many

of the interviewees have experienced difficulty in keeping groups working. Especially they find it difficult to deal with personal matters within the groups. Due to the small size of most groups, members tend to be very close to each other and, naturally, there are personal problems among them. The interviewees point out that personal issues often disturb and damage the management of groups. This raises another issue that needs to be addressed: how can they keep good balance between the political activities of the organizations and the social activities and relationships among the members, and how, in general, can we manage the complicated connections, and disjunctions, between the personal and the political?

With all these tasks, nevertheless, the future is not without hope. Many of the interviewees see that circumstances are improving little by little. Looking back at the twenty-year evolution of API lesbian and bisexual activism, one can trace the progress, although, as one of the interviewees says, it is hard to see when you are in the middle of it.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

I. Personal Questions

1) Demographic Questions

Name

Date of birth

Place of birth

Specific ethnicity/race

Generation

Class: Working - Lower middle - Middle - Upper middle - Upper.

Sexual orientation: Lesbian - Bisexual - Other

Religion (personal, family)

Highest educational level: Elementary school - Junior high - High school
- College - Bachelor's degree - Master's degree - Ph.D. - Other

Occupation (If you are a student, please specify your major(s), and
year.)

Parents' occupations

Marital status: ~~Never-married~~ - ~~Ever-married~~ (Please circle one:
~~Divorced/Widowed~~) - ~~Now-married~~ - Separated - Other

Do you have any children? ☐ Yes ☐ No If yes, how many?

Current place of residence

Are you living alone? ☐ Yes ☐ No If no, please specify the
relationship(s) between you and the person(s) with whom you are living.

Are you a citizen of the United States? ☐ Yes ☐ No

How long have you been in the US? ☐ years ☐ months

2) Identity/ies

Please identify yourself in your own words(e.g. Asian Pacific Islander
(API) lesbian).

APPENDIX A

Please describe the environment/atmosphere in which you were brought up (family, community, school, etc.). How was it tolerant/intolerant of racial/ethnic and/or sexual differences?

Are you out? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, describe your coming out: to whom(yourself, parent(s), sibling(s), friend(s), employment(s), etc.), when, why, how, their reactions, etc.

If not, why not?

What impacts and effects did the coming outs/non-coming outs have on your identities?

Do you have a partner(s)? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, how close is/are s/he/they? (Please circle one): Dating - "Married" - Other (Please specify)

What is her/their ethnicity/race, sexual orientation, age, etc.?

Do you notice any effects of your partner(s)'s existence(s) on your sexual/ethnic identity and/or your activities as a "lesbian/bisexual woman of Asian descent"? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, please describe them. (Please feel free to tell illustrative stories.)

What kind of feelings/opinions do you have about:

(1) the lesbian/bisexual community in terms of your ethnic/racial identity?

(2) the ethnic community in terms of your sexual identity?

(3) the API lesbian/bisexual community, comparing to 1) and/or 2)?

Have you ever felt that you are stereotyped around sexuality, ethnicity/race, activism, etc.? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, what kind of stereotypes were/are there? And how did the stereotypes affect your conceptions of sexual/ethnic identity?

APPENDIX A

3) Activism

Do you consider yourself as an activist? [] Yes [] No

How do you define activism?

What kind of activities have you done before/are you doing now as a "lesbian/bisexual woman of Asian descent" socially and politically? And what were the driving forces for you to begin the activities (concerns, issues, feelings, etc.)?

If you are in the academy, what is the relationship between the academic work and activism?

What theory/ies do you adopt, if any (feminist theories, queer theories, critical race theory, etc.)?

What is the relationship between theory/ies and:

(1) political practice?

(2) personal practice?

What do you think of current situations around the activism of API lesbians and bisexual women? How about the future?

What do you think of current trends in the US around immigration, affirmative action, homophobia, gay marriage, etc.?

II. Organizational Questions

Organization name(s)

Year(s) of founding

Town

Year(s)/month(s) of your participation: From [] to []

Number of members (Please make clear changes over time, if any.)

Type of members (sexual orientation, ethnicity/race, nation, generation, class, educational background, age, etc. Please make clear changes over time, if any.)

APPENDIX A

Why and how did the organization emerge at the particular moment that it did?

What were the primary aims/goals in starting the organization?
To what extent have they been achieved? Have there been any changes in the aims/goals to date?

What did you expect in participating in the organization(s)?
How are you satisfied with the organization(s), considering the primary expectations that you had when you joined?
What have you gained from the activities you did in the organization(s)?
(Please specify the activities, too.)

What theories were/are used, if any?

What issues mobilized the activism of the organization(s)?

What forms of activism were/are there in the organization(s)?

How did/does leadership work (Please make clear changes over time, if any.)?

What issues divided activists? (Please tell stories, if any.)
And how were/are the divisions/differences dealt with?

How easy was/is it to bring the issue of the divisions/differences in the organization/personal circle? Why?

Have the issues of identity (racial/ethnic, class, sexual, national, generational, regional, etc.) been divisive in the organization(s)?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, were/are there any efforts to get beyond the divisions?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, what were/are they?

If no, why not?

If the issues of identity have not been divisive, how was that made possible?

APPENDIX A

Has the organization built coalitions with other organizations across racial/ethnic/sexual/gender/class/national/generational/regional lines?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, please explain them (With which organization(s)? When? On what issues? How did they work?, etc.).

If no, why not?

What is the relationship between the organization and the API lesbian/bisexual community?

How is the organization representative of the community?

Are there any problems in the organization today? If there are, please explain them.

Are there any plans/prospects for the future?

In general: What do you see as the possibilities/limitations of organizing people who identify themselves as "API lesbian/bisexual woman"?

What do you think of Queer Nation or organizations like it?

APPENDIX B

APPENDIX B

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILES OF INTERVIEWEES

Angela is a 28 year-old Korean American bisexual woman who was born in South Korea and was adopted at 22 months old by Caucasian parents in Indiana. She is currently the social committee head of Los Angeles Asian Pacific Islander Sisters (LAAPIS) in California. She lives in Los Angeles with her partner, Patty.

Diane is a 25 year-old Singaporean lesbian woman. She has been in the U.S. as a student for four years and nine months. Now she lives in Singapore and plans to go back to the U.S. next year with her partner.

Dorothy is a 32 year-old second generation Korean American woman who was born in Detroit, Michigan. She is a Ph.D. candidate of Performance Studies and lives in New York City.

Karen is a 46 year-old Sansei (the third generation) Japanese American lesbian woman who was born in Wamawa, Hawai'i. She currently lives in San Francisco, California with her partner. They have domestic partner status.

Kate is a 28 year-old forth generation Okinawan American lesbian woman who was born in Los Angeles. She has a Master's degree in English Literature and lives in Brooklyn, New York.

Lisa is a 43 year-old first generation Chinese American lesbian woman who was born in Newark, New Jersey. She is a writer who lives in Oakland, California with her life/domestic partners.

Patty is a 23 year-old Filipina bisexual woman who was born in the Philippines and raised in Los Angeles. She is currently the co-chair of LAAPIS and lives in Los Angeles with her partner, Angela.

Tracy is a 22 year-old Chinese American bisexual woman who was born in Flint, Michigan. Graduating from University of Michigan, she is currently a graduate student in Statistics and lives in Seattle,

APPENDIX B

Washington.

Veronica is a 21 year-old Chinese Burmese American lesbian woman who was born in Rangoon, Burma (Myanmar) and immigrated to San Francisco at 10 months old. Graduating from Mills College in Oakland, California this spring, she plans to work for a non-profit organization.

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