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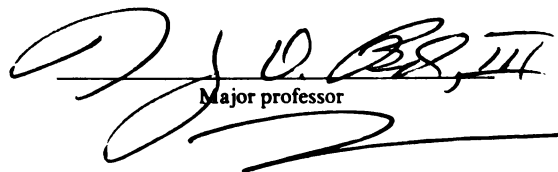
Explorations in Bicultural Identity: The Creation of an  
Asian Literature Club

presented by

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has been accepted towards fulfillment  
of the requirements for

Ph.D. degree in Educational Psychology

  
Major professor

Date July 13, 2001

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EXPLORATIONS IN BICULTURAL IDENTITY: THE CREATION OF AN ASIAN  
LITERATURE CLUB

By

Sapna Vyas

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to  
Michigan State University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

2001



## ABSTRACT

### EXPLORATIONS IN BICULTURAL IDENTITY: THE CREATION OF AN ASIAN LITERATURE CLUB

By

Sapna Vyas

This dissertation explores the relationship between literacy (i.e., reading, writing, and oral discussion) and bicultural identity through the formation of an after school literature club for high school students of Asian descent. This intervention provided seven participants with a supportive literacy environment within which they could communicate and interact with students of similar cultural backgrounds on potential identity tensions and related issues that were pertinent in their lives. Using literature and movies by Asian individuals as a starting point for conversations about identity, participants were given the opportunity to voice issues and concerns related to their experiences growing up bicultural in the United States. Data was collected in the form of field notes, video recordings (of club discussion), audio recordings (of pre-post intervention interviews), written reflections on literature, pre-post questionnaires, and the facilitator's personal research journal. Research findings reveal that the creation and sustainability of a literacy activity is not a seamless process; facilitators and educators must be open to flexibility and change, as they may have to engage in restructuring literacy activities to better suit participants' needs and interests. Research findings also reveal that in order to understand the identity-related variation that potentially exists between bicultural individuals, it is necessary to study the

relationship between what individuals attribute to the core and periphery aspects of their bicultural identities. This relational understanding of bicultural identity challenges views that are upheld in the identity research of Erik Erikson and Kenneth Gergen, who portray the notions of “core” and “periphery” as isolated entities, and in effect, only offer us partial views of what identity may mean to individuals who find themselves negotiating between participation in two cultures. Lastly, research findings highlight three different ways that the relationship between the literacy activity and participants manifested itself over the course of the intervention.

## DEDICATION

*I would like to dedicate this dissertation to the most encouraging and motivating friend I could ever ask for: my dog Bam Bam. Because of his undying enthusiasm and persistence, I was literally forced to get up from my computer and embark on many inspirational walks throughout the course of the summer, often prompting me to think through and further develop the ideas and thoughts that were eventually included within the context of my dissertation!*

*I would like to thank him for pulling me away from my computer when I needed a break from writing...sometimes I just needed that energetic boost to keep going!*



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply indebted to many people for their encouragement and support during my doctoral experience at MSU. I would like to thank my officemates at 511 EH for always being there when I needed a burst of inspiration, a new perspective, or a shoulder to lean on. I would also like to thank King Beach, David Pearson, Punya Mishra, and Laura Apol – the most wonderful dissertation committee that has ever existed! Your insight and wisdom are immeasurable in my eyes, and I am deeply appreciative that I have had the chance to work with all of you. Last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank my family. Because of your unconditional love and faith in me, I am where I am today. I feel so truly blessed.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In the early 1970's, my parents and my brother immigrated to the United States from India. With high career aspirations and dreams of monetary success, my father, along with some of his medical college colleagues, embarked on what he jokingly calls the "Five Year Plan": As medical residents in the United States, they would have the opportunity to become versed in medicine in a technologically and socially advanced country. They would also earn a lot of money within a short period of time, and then return to India and live like kings!

Moving to a foreign land posed many challenges for them, including leaving behind loved ones, learning a new language and culture, and making enough money to make ends meet. At times, the tension between conforming to the beliefs and ideals of mainstream American culture vs. holding on to the native mores and traditions that they held so closely to their hearts caused them some distress and puzzlement, and led them to question whether moving to the United States was indeed the best decision for them and their families. Battling occasional bouts of homesickness and pangs of nostalgia, they nonetheless grew very attached to their new home and became content with the opportunities that it afforded. They finally decided that they would be happier living in the United States, and would like to raise their children here. Now, twenty-nine years later, my parents are not only proud and happy citizens of the United States, but continue to maintain strong ties with the important individuals, experiences, and relationships that they left behind in India many years ago. A blissful outcome to an adventurous and unpredictable experience in the lives of my parents!

As the first American born individual of my family, I have also encountered many triumphs and obstacles in my life, though as a member of the second generation, many of my experiences are very different from the experiences of my parents and other first generation individuals. As a high school student, in

particular, I found that living life at the juncture of Indian and mainstream American cultures often complicated my sense of personal identity, and on various occasions, affected the nature of my transitions between home and school. These personal experiences have fueled my research interests in studying the identity experiences of high school students of Asian descent, who, as students of ethnic minority backgrounds, are likely to experience discrepancies between their home and school “worlds” (Phelan, Davidson, and Yu, 1996; Westby & Roman, 1995).

In my practicum research, I explored issues of continuity and change in Indian bicultural adolescents’ identity development between home and school. I used the identity viewpoints of Erik Erikson and Kenneth Gergen as the theoretical points of departure for my study. Erikson (1980) views identity as a representation of continuity that is constant across various contexts. According to him, the process of forming one’s identity involves a lifelong, invariant developmental sequence; Gergen (1991), on the other hand, posits that identity is a representation of change (in terms of actions and behaviors) that occurs across various contexts. Through a preliminary study that I conducted with a small group of second generation Indian adolescents, one important finding was that some participants experienced identity in the form of inner continuity (i.e., considering oneself “Indian American”) but also, simultaneously experienced identity in the form of outer change (i.e., feeling more Indian/American/or Indian American depending on the particular context), hence these two theories should not be necessarily regarded as mutually exclusive, especially in regards to the complex identity experiences of bicultural adolescents. Another important finding was that although some students did not view their transitions between home and school as being particularly stressful or troublesome, they repeatedly emphasized that it was often difficult to juggle the high academic expectations of



parents, peers, and teachers, especially when these expectations conflicted with their sense of self. Hence, I found that the process of negotiating between different organizations of cultural beliefs, values, and expectations is often an intricate process, and may contribute to varying tensions within one's sense of bicultural identity.

Given that one of the tasks of schooling is not only to support academic learning, but also, to support identity development (Eckert 1989; Wenger, 1998), I began to wonder if the development of special interest groups and social organizations within school settings may help adolescents reduce tensions that were related to their senses of identity, as well as help them bridge the possible gaps that exist between their home and school worlds. This idea led to the development of my dissertation study, which I will describe in full detail in the pages to follow.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review draws upon three different bodies of literature: that which focuses on identity, the home/school connection, and the relationship between literacy and identity. I chose to focus on the identity literature because the identity theories of Erik Erikson and Kenneth Gergen propose contrasting points of view of its development, and raise questions for how we, as researchers, may approach the study of bicultural identity. I explore the notion of "bicultural identity" as a tool for examining bicultural adolescents' identity negotiations between home and school, which are two social institutions that often represent two different cultures in their lives. I stress the importance of not just looking at "bicultural identity" as a specialized type of adolescent identity, but rather, as a lens for examining processes that are relevant to all adolescents. The use of bicultural identity as a lens into the home and school negotiation may deepen our understanding of the impact of sociocultural and contextual components that guide all adolescents' identity choices and transitions between home and school.

Furthermore, because education plays a major role in how bicultural immigrant students have come to identify themselves across generations (Ogbu, 1990; Portes & Rumbaut, 1996; Rumbaut, 1998), in order for us to help Asian immigrant high school students deal more effectively with possible discontinuities between home and school, and in turn, better understand their processes of identity development between these cultural worlds, it becomes increasingly important to study the relationship between literacy and identity. Literacy may

strongly influence the development, exploration, and expression (s) of identity, and may be a means by which we help these students deal more effectively with possible gaps between their different cultural worlds.

### Two Different Ways of Viewing Identity...

The potential tensions that bicultural adolescents may experience are well captured by the identity research of Erik Erikson (1980) and Kenneth Gergen (1991), who proposed two competing paradigms that attempt to account for identity development. Erikson, on the one hand, describes identity as a sense of continuity or coherence that one achieves during the period of adolescence. During the early stages of psychosocial development, children make many identifications to "parts of people" who have immediately affected them, whether it be in reality or fantasy. Throughout childhood, the individual acquires multiple identifications. The establishment of *ego identity* results from this gradual integration of identifications. With the increasing number of social roles in one's life, as well as more and more of these identifications, an "evolving configuration" emerges, with the main purpose of synthesizing "identity fragments" into a cohesive sense of continuity. During the period of "psychosocial moratoria", which occurs during the "identity formation vs. identity diffusion" stage in adolescence, the adolescent continually strives to reconcile his/her self-conception with society's recognition of him/her. By the end of this psychosocial stage, the adolescent's developmental task is to formulate a coherent sense of personal identity, thus arriving at identity conflict resolution.

Some researchers (Kim, 1998; Ochse & Plug, 1986) have explored Erikson's identity framework in relation to issues of cultural identity. In a cross-cultural study that focused on the psychosocial identity development of Korean American adolescents, Kim (1998) sought to determine whether Korean American adolescents experienced more severe identity crises than mainstream American adolescents, and whether the difference depended on their gender or generational status. She found that not only were there marked differences between how Korean American and mainstream American adolescents resolved their identity crises, but also, that there were significant differences between first and second generation Korean American adolescents. Similarly, Ochse & Plug (1986) conducted a cross-cultural analysis of South African White and Black adult males and females, in order to assess when individuals in these different groups and genders appeared to resolve their identity crises. They found that White women resolved their identity crises first, then White men, followed by Black men. Black women in their study appeared to have the most frustrating time coping with identity-related tensions.

In contrast to Erikson's more traditional vision of identity, Gergen posits the need to move from a modernist vision of the "self as central" to a postmodernist vision of the "self as decentered," in which the forces of social saturation (e.g., technological and social advancement) force the individual to take on many different social roles. In the process of the "consciousness of self construction", the idea of a unique core identity is rejected and emphasis is placed on the individual's many social roles. In the first stage, known as *strategic*

*manipulation*, the individual still depends on a solid confirmation of identity, and becomes increasingly distressed when he/she finds him/herself playing various social roles. Modernist beliefs of an "essential self" become increasingly downplayed, as the individual enters the *pastiche personality* stage, where he/she borrows elements of identity from a variety of social sources. In the third stage, *the emergence of relational self*, the individual accepts that his/her sense of self is constructed and reconstructed in multiple contexts. The sense of inner coherence at the beginning of this process gives way to the notion of interdependence (on other individuals and contexts), and the concept of change (in terms of identity) becomes apparent. Similar to Erikson's view, identity making is considered a lifelong process, as it can be explained in narrative terms, with continuity existing between one's different life events.

Few researchers (Minoura, 1995; Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992) have related Gergen's identity framework to issues of cultural identity. In a study of adolescents with bicultural parentage in Japan, Minoura (1995) examined how adolescents form a sense of identity by incorporating different cultural "meanings" which prevail in their environments. She found that friendship networks provided a context that influenced adolescents' subjective expressions of identity. Using the Gergen identity framework differently, Rosenwald & Ochberg (1992) argued that autobiographical narratives play an influential role in the process of identity formation, and that the way they are told is fashioned by common cultural norms in society.

As it becomes evident in interpreting the main tenets of Erikson and Gergen's theories, as well as when reviewing past cultural identity research that utilizes each of these respective frameworks, these two theorists appear to approach identity in contrasting ways. Erikson sees identity as being what one defines as a "core" trait (i.e., "I consider myself to be Asian"). One's core is likely to be continuous and coherent in nature. Gergen, on the other hand, views identity as a periphery-based phenomenon, as it is often variable, adaptive, and context-specific in nature (i.e., "I consider myself to be 'Asian' in some situations, but sometimes, I also consider myself to be 'American', depending on the particular social context, time, and place").

How might we apply these two different viewpoints to the identity experiences of bicultural adolescents?

Empirical evidence supports the viability of both of these theories; However, these two theories appear problematical in considering the experiences of some individuals who espouse a sense of bicultural identity, or "live at the juncture of two cultures, and can lay a claim to belonging to both cultures" (LaFromboise, Coleman, and Gerton, 1993). Why is this? In my practicum research (Vyas, 1998), I found that the experiences of three participants support the idea that one may experience identity in the form of continuity (i.e., considering themselves "Indian American" and "Indian") but also, simultaneously experience identity in the form of change (i.e., feeling more Indian/American/or Indian American depending on the particular context). The following quotations from Dinesh and Rita, two second generation Indian high school students, exemplify this idea:

I'm Indian American. First of all, my roots are in India. My parents are Indian. I eat Indian food. I wear Indian clothes. I sleep in Indian clothes sometimes. At home, my lifestyle is Indian. I talk to my

parents in Hindi or English or whatever..then at school, I'm American and we live in America. (Dinesh)

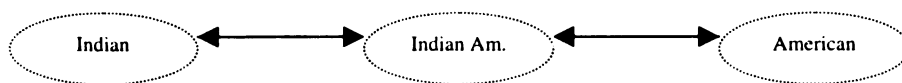
Both [Indian and American]. I live in the US. I consider myself American 'cause I wear American clothes. I participate in American culture; but still, I have ties with my Indian background. I go to temple. I can understand my native language. I go visit India, and I wear Indian clothes sometimes. (Rita)

Both of these students consider themselves to be "Indian American", but acknowledge that depending on the social context, they experience identity differently. Thus, the results of this study illustrate that although Erikson and Gergen's theories each capture some aspects of bicultural identity, they do not fully explain the complex nature of its development.

#### Preliminary Theoretical Conceptualization of Bicultural Identity

The theoretical conceptualization of bicultural identity (Vyas, 1998) that I began to develop in my practicum research argues for a new understanding of identity formation: one which acknowledges some elements or qualities of continuity that allow the individual to feel some sense of self sameness across context and time, yet also allows for some variation due to sociocultural changes in individual-context relationships. As evident in Figure 1, three circular shapes represent the three different types of identity that the participants (Vyas, 1998) considered themselves as: Indian, Indian American, and American. Each "identity type" is outlined with broken lines, indicating that the boundaries of bicultural identity are permeable and subject to change. The arrows between the identity types indicate that the individuals may experience situational changes in identity, as they are able to move between different identity types.

Figure 1



According to this initial conceptualization of identity, although individuals may be born into an ethnic group with certain ideological and cultural constraints, such as a "castelike minority" (Ogbu, 1990), a "stigmatized group" (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991), or most commonly stated, a "minority group", with certain attitudes, beliefs, values, and codes for living, they have some power to negotiate the boundaries of culture; for instance, they can decide on the degree of their bicultural identification (e.g., more or less Indian or American) and have the ability to make meaning of culture on their own terms as well as collectively with members of the ethnic group that they are born into. An individual's sense of being bicultural may vary widely, depending on how he/she perceives the two cultures and the degrees to which he/she identifies with each (Phinney & Devich-Navarro, 1997). Hence, in developing a sense of identity, one may have a sense of individual agency in the process (Bandura, 1999; Holland & Skinner, 1997). This idea stands in contrast to both Erikson and Gergen's conceptualizations of identity, which do not explicitly recognize this notion of individual agency. Erikson focuses on how the quest to develop a coherent sense of identity is a lifelong quest, and manifests itself in a universal, invariant developmental sequence. Gergen, on the other hand, focuses on the role of social context and relationships in determining which identity one displays in a particular situation.

Although the actual maintenance and preservation of a particular cultural group can be a collective endeavor, individual variation should be included in order to represent culture most accurately. Thus, to make a comparison to my own work, although the core cultural attitudes, beliefs, values, and codes of living



may be similar for a particular group of individuals who share the same background and heritage, variations in their experiences with culture may result in various processes of bicultural identity development: such as different ways of negotiating tensions within one's sense of bicultural identity. Initially, based on my practicum findings, I believed that the degree of tension that one experienced with one's sense of bicultural identity was reduced when an individual experienced a sense of coherence in the process of identity formation, yet also felt that he/she could comfortably "code switch" depending on the particular context he/she was participating in. For instance, an individual who defined him/herself as "Indian American", but was comfortably able to portray the Indian or American aspects of his/her identity depending on the particular context, probably experienced a lower level of tension within his/her sense of bicultural identity in comparison to another individual who did not experience a sense of coherence and comfortable ability to "code switch." Due to the diversity of the sample in my dissertation study, however, I have reconceptualized my ideas about how bicultural individuals may negotiate the different aspects of their identities (see Chapter 5).

Thus, my initial conceptualization of bicultural identity was similar to both Erikson and Gergen's identity models because it acknowledged some sense of self-sameness (like Erikson's model) and it allowed the process of identity development to be dynamic, due to social and cultural changes in individual-context relationships (like Gergen's model). However, my preliminary conceptualization differed from both identity models in important ways. Erikson's

identity model did not acknowledge that the individual may have to negotiate cultural boundaries in terms of his/her sense of identity across the lifespan. Erikson's theory only allows this negotiation of cultural boundaries to take place during early adolescence; as the individual moved through the period of adolescence, the broken lines of the three circular shapes would have to become solid lines and the arrows between the different identity types would have to disappear.

My conceptualization related to Gergen's identity model, in that it allowed for a sense of social construction in relation to one's identity. One could alternate between feeling "Indian", "American", or "Indian American", depending on the nature of the context. Whether feeling one way or the other can be equated with having multiple identities as Gergen proposes, however, was questionable in my opinion. I would have sooner use the term "social role" to describe what Gergen calls "identity", but nonetheless, this theoretical conceptualization represented the gist of what Gergen and I were both attempting to demonstrate: that identity is a dynamic phenomenon and can experience changes, and all aspects of it do not necessarily remain continuous across participation in different contexts.

### The Home/School Connection: Moving Between Different Worlds

An examination of the connection between home and school helps shed light on the issues of continuity and change (i.e., discontinuities) that the bicultural student may encounter in his/her daily life, and whether or not these

features of identity can coexist. Many of these individuals' identity negotiations may relate to how they position themselves in relation to home and school.

Some researchers describe home and school as two very different "worlds" in which adolescents find themselves negotiating and constructing their cultural realities. According to Westby and Roman (1995), students from culturally and linguistically diverse environments must learn to live successfully in two different "cultural worlds": home and school. Some students may encounter difficulty, because they can master one world but not the other. They provide examples of students whose beliefs, values, and learning style (based on the home culture) may differ from that of the school, leading them to reject the school culture entirely and ultimately become high school dropouts. On the other hand, some students may feel pressured by others, such as their peers, to abandon their home cultures and decide to assimilate into the school world, according to Westby and Roman (1995).

Phelan, Davidson, and Yu (1996) also follow this "world theme" as they present a model of the interrelationships between family, school, and peer worlds in a high school student's life. Stating that prior research has generally focused on these worlds as distinct entities, they posit the need to look at how these worlds combine with one another to affect adolescents' engagement with learning. They examine the nature of boundaries and processes of movement between worlds, as well as strategies that students employ to adapt to different contexts and settings. During the course of the "Multiple Worlds Study", Phelan et al. uncovered distinctive patterns among students as they move across the

various worlds, and arrive at the following typology: Type I (Congruent Worlds/Smooth Transitions), Type II (Different Worlds/Boundary Crossings), Type III (Different Worlds/Boundary Crossings Hazardous), and Type IV (Borders Impenetrable/Boundary Crossings Insurmountable). They conclude that although many students are able to cross boundaries successfully, they are frequently forced to deny aspects of who they are in the process of movement between their family, school, and peer worlds.

These examples illustrate that some students must learn how to balance between participation in many worlds; hence, they may undergo some sort of negotiation process in their transitions between home and school. In some cases, these worlds may allow for continuity, in terms of the student's actions and behaviors, allowing the transition to be less troublesome. In order to fully comprehend the experiences of students who must balance different cultural worlds, however, we should not assume that there is always continuity between home and school, nor should we assume that continuity is what must be achieved in terms of identity development between home and school. There are also potential discontinuities between students' worlds, and these discontinuities are accentuated in the home/school research of other researchers.

#### Home/School Discontinuities Research

Researchers such as Ogbu (1982) and Stearns (1986) focus on cultural discontinuities that revolve around the learning styles of students. Ogbu distinguishes between three different types of discontinuities: universal, primary, and secondary. *Universal discontinuities* may result from a difference between

social-emotional socialization received in home and school. For all children, both minority and non-minority students, there may be an initial discontinuity in terms of contextual learning and learning style. *Primary discontinuities* result from cultural developments which took place before the given population came into actual contact with middle class Western-type culture. *Secondary discontinuities* develop as a response to a "contact situation". Members of a subordinate group, such as some "caste like minorities" (e.g., African Americans, Chicanos, Native Americans, and Puerto Ricans) may develop certain coping behaviors or attitudes that are different from that of their "oppressor", which is represented by middle class White culture. Ogbu stresses the necessity of distinguishing between the latter two types of discontinuities, as a disregard for differences between the two may lead to global and stereotyped descriptions of minority group cultures. Also examining students' learning styles, Stearns identifies discontinuities within school classrooms in rural Yucatan, attributing them to the clash between Mayan students' learning styles and their Latino teachers' method of instruction.

Other researchers, such as Garret (1995), conceptualize discontinuity as a clash between the value systems of the home and school. Mainstream values emphasize saving, domination, competition, aggression, individualism, a nuclear family, and a preference for scientific explanations. Traditional Native American values, on the other hand, consist of sharing, cooperation, noninterference, the group and extended family, and a preference for explanation of natural phenomena according to the supernatural. As a result of being exposed to the



mainstream value system and its demands, Native American youth may feel stranded between two cultures. They are aware of their cultural traditions and would like to hold on to them, but on the other hand, feel the pressures of assimilation and may end up giving in to mainstream societal expectations. Unfortunately, this clash between value systems is hypothesized as a major reason for the unusually high Native American school dropout rate.

In her study of Sikh immigrants in California, Gibson (1988) accentuates a clash between home values and peer values. She finds that Sikh students experience numerous value conflicts in their interactions with peers at school. Sikh students, whose physical appearance makes them stand out in the school setting, report being harassed by other students. They are often criticized for giving in to the norms of their home culture, such as in the way they dress, their values, their acceptance of arranged marriages, engagement in group decision making, and placing family in front of individual interests. Furthermore, girls are even more affected by a clash in value systems, as they receive conflicting messages from home and school in terms of what their future goals should be. While on the one hand they are encouraged to work hard and aspire for future educational goals at school, at home, many are simply expected to graduate and undergo arranged marriages directly after high school.

Katz (1991) takes a more cognitive view of the clash between value systems, and views values as being a part of one's "cultural script", or the way a person views the world, behaves, and thinks. These scripts develop as a result of viewing people that we try to emulate, and from the process of extracting rules

from our personal experiences (i.e., in developing our schemas). Children may not be able to handle information in school the way they are expected; however, this is not because they have never encountered the information before, but because they may not have the necessary script to make meaning of the information. This situation is likely to occur when school information and home information are different or conflicting, thus difficult to incorporate or connect for proper use.

Hence, as "institutional fixtures" in their lives, the home and school often elicit different values, beliefs, and expectations on the part of the student, in turn, affecting his/her identity development between home and school. Bicultural high school students, in particular, may be more apt to experience tensions and discontinuities in the transition between their home and school "worlds" (Phelan, Davidson, and Yu, 1996; Westby & Roman, 1995), whether it be in the form of different learning styles (Ogbu, 1982; Stearns, 1986), value systems (Garret, 1985; Gibson, 1988), or cultural "scripts" (Katz, 1991).

#### Home/School Discontinuities Research that Addresses Issues of Identity

The above-mentioned authors explore issues relating to discontinuities between home and school; however, they do not explicitly address the concept of identity. I stress that the study of identity development between home and school is particularly important for high school students, as identity formation is a major developmental task during the period of adolescence. Furthermore, issues pertaining to differences between home and school may become particularly salient in the case of bicultural high school students who often find themselves



struggling to achieve a sense of identity in the midst of participation between different cultures or worlds.

Lee (1994) argues that identity is negotiated through experiences and relationships both inside and outside of the school setting. Previous research, in her opinion, has lumped Asian students under one broad label. She attempts to move away from such categorizations and creates further divisions based on ethnographic research at "Academic High". The three "identity groups" are called "Asian", "Asian New Wave", and "Asian American". Lee focuses on the different roles that the primary actors who are involved in home and school, such as parents, teachers, and peers, enact in the formation of students' identities.

Eckert (1989) also contends that identity is negotiated through experiences in and out of the school setting. She focuses on two different cliques in a Detroit suburban high school: the jocks and the burnouts. According to Eckert, jocks base their lives and identities on the school's extracurricular sphere and embody middle class culture. Their social networks are largely limited to the school itself. The burnouts reject the school as the center of social life and base their lives on the "margins of school", such as the local community and the neighborhood. They embody working class culture, and are mostly work bound/vocational students. These socially opposed categories are what Eckert labels "communities of practice", and they embody different forms of institutional participation, institutional knowledge, and forms of identity. With their past and outside experiences, jocks and burnouts form an orientation towards the school, and are led to seek various resources in order to pursue different interests. In

effect, these students yield divergent understandings of the world outside of school.

Matute-Bianchi's fieldwork (see Delgado-Gaitan, 1991) focuses on variations in school performance patterns among Mexican-descent high school students, and points to a relationship between academic performance and perceptions of ethnic identities. She talks about five major categories within which most students can be placed: 1) recent Mexican immigrants, 2) Mexican oriented, 3) Mexican Americans, 4) Chicano, and 5) Cholo. These categories are not always easily identifiable. Matute-Bianchi pushes the idea that ethnic categories have assorted meanings in diverse social settings and for different individuals. She points to Spicer's (as cited in Delgado-Gaitan, 1991) interactionist approach and the idea of opposition in ethnic identity formation: that contact with other ethnic groups helps one strengthen his/her sense of ethnic identity. A collective, oppositional identity can be viewed as an adaptive strategy that enables students of Mexican descent to "endure their status as a stigmatized minority within a system of structural inequality" (as cited in Delgado-Gaitan, 1991).

Hence, tensions or discontinuities between home and school are often what drive the development of bicultural identity. As apparent in the above mentioned research, the negotiation between home and school has been viewed from many angles; the theme of identity development between home and school, however, has been addressed by few researchers (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Eckert, 1989; Lee, 1994). Given that identity formation is a major developmental

task during the period of adolescence, it becomes pertinent to examine identity in relation to bicultural adolescents' transitions between home and school. In some cases, home may represent their native culture, while school may represent dominant White middle class culture. This may create difficulties for identity formation, as academic success is often equated with "giving up" some aspect (s) of the home culture (Ogbu, 1990). Furthermore, as one of the tasks of schooling is to not only to support academic learning, but also, to support identity development (Eckert, 1989; Wenger, 1998), the process of understanding how bicultural adolescents negotiate between different organizations of cultural beliefs, values, and expectations in developing their identities becomes an important issue.

#### The Relationship between Literacy and Identity

I propose that in order to better understand the home and school experiences of bicultural youths, as well as help them deal more effectively with such discontinuities as learning style differences and clashes of value systems, it becomes increasingly important to study the relationship between literacy and identity. A review of past and present research on the relationship between literacy and identity reveals that the relationship between identity and literacy should be seen as bi-directional, as identity mediates the process of becoming literate and the types of literate behaviors that one subsequently engages in, while literacy education also serves to influence and shape an individual's sense of identity (Ferdman, 1990). Hence, literacy is a powerful force in the construction, exploration, and expression (s) of identity, and is a potential means by which we can help students bridge the possible gaps between their home and school worlds.

In my review of the literature, I found five different ways that the relationship between different forms of literacy and identity has been demonstrated in relation to a) reading only, b) writing only, c) oral literacy, d) a combination of reading and writing, and e) a combination of reading, writing, and oral literacy.

### Reading

Cherland (1994) explores identity practices employed by female students who are exploring their identities through reading fiction books in a book club. Her overarching question is "What does reading mean to these sixth grade girls?" She proposes that these girls use their reading of fiction as a means of exploring new possibilities for female agency, meaning, possibilities beyond the ones that society considers to be the norm for females. She views texts as a "fantasy vehicle" which allows girls to cope with the reality of their lives and positions dictated by society.

### Writing

Some researchers have studied the relationship between writing and identity. Ivanic (1998) stresses the need to go beyond traditional notions of context (e.g., physical environments and settings) by acknowledging the social purposes and relationships that go behind people's writing. She discusses the notion of *literacy practices*, or "culturally shaped ways in which literacy serves social ends" (p. 65). Literacy, in this sense, does not refer to an array of skills, but rather, a constellation of various practices that vary, depending on the literacy event that is taking place. Individuals rarely draw upon a single set of practices, as they may align themselves with the beliefs and interests of many different literacy practices which are common within the culture of which they are a part. Thus, in terms of writer identity (which is Ivanic's focus), individuals find themselves negotiating among multiple identities as a writer, both as a

consequence of participating in a vast variety of culturally shaped literacy events and as a result of the various literacy practices that they participate in within these events.

Horowitz (1995) examines uses of speech in written language while addressing the presentation of social and cultural identity in writing. She asserts that bilingual and bicultural speakers and writers are often judged very critically because monolinguals do not feel comfortable with the code switching and cultural expressions that they use. Some distinct features of their writing are the following: many bilingual and bicultural writers use informal, colloquial language, containing such features as topic shifts, repetitions, and incompleteness of ideas. There is some evidence of dialogue in writing, such as actual speech and conversational exchanges. There is also some evidence of code switching, that is, a combination of Spanish and English lexical items in writing. Written discourse is developed in relation to oral strategies; for instance, in some cases, punctuation had been changed in order to more accurately represent oral speech patterns. Lastly, there is definite evidence of voice in their writing, though it is not always consistent across pieces of writing. Hence, the presence of conversational speech in writing may accentuate prominent aspects of bilingual and bicultural individuals' social and cultural identities. Horowitz posits the need for teachers to support the expression of students' personal identities in literacy activities, because through the use of speech in writing, one may shape and reshape one's sense of social or cultural identity.

### Reading and Writing

Some researchers have examined the relationship between reading, writing, and identity. Henry (1998) conducted a weekly reading and writing workshop for African Caribbean girls. Her goal was to provide students with issues that appeared to be relevant in their lives, so they could ponder and reflect

upon these issues, and come up with their own understandings. During the process of reading together, students would be encouraged to relate selected passages to their own lives. Furthermore, they were asked to engage in *peer conferences*, in order to legitimate their ideas and listen to one another's ideas, and were encouraged to participate in *problem-posing circles*, a process that allowed students to explore and draw upon their personal experiences in order to analyze social situations (Henry, 1998). This study reports the importance of "giving voice" to girls in their daily reading and writing activities. By letting girls "read oneself, write oneself, speak oneself into our curriculum" (p.241), they were allowed to explore connections to their identities as African Caribbean girls.

Puckett (1992) explores issues of identity in relation to gender-based divisions of reading, writing, and labor in a rural eastern Kentucky community. She argues that literate interactions are very strongly linked to the symbolic values that men and women assign to themselves. Women are described as being linked to reading and writing, for instance, being the ones responsible for filling out order forms for their husbands or writing letters. Men, on the other hand, often seem nonchalant in regards to reading and writing, and tend to embrace activities that do not require a lot of literate activity in this particular community (e.g., physical labor). Hence, depending on their links to literacy practices in the community, men and women will express their identities differently.

### Oral Literacy

Some researchers have studied the relationship between oral literacy and identity. Bell (1997) elaborates on her own literacy experiences as an American researcher learning to speak Chinese. In the process of acquiring this second language, she finds that her sense of identity is challenged because she acquires literacy in a language so different from her native language, which is English.

She finds herself negotiating between displaying certain aspects of herself and her character, depending on the type (e.g., Chinese or English) of literacy she is participating in. Thus, in her words, "literacy provides the external display of the self, so that a new literacy is like looking in the mirror with a new face" (p. 26). Literacy acquisition in a language other than one's native language not only requires the physical act of practicing and learning vocabulary, syntax, and grammar, but also involves challenges that pertain to negotiations between one's present sense of self in relation to experiences with newer senses of self.

Ladson-Billings (1992) is also concerned with issues related to the relationship between oral literacy and identity, but she approaches the topic from a different angle: that of instruction. She expands on the notion of "culturally relevant" teaching and how it may enable the formation of connections between students' cultural identities (as minority students) and the literacy events that take place within the classroom. From her observations in the classroom, Ladson-Billings arrives at several tenets of culturally relevant teaching: students whose educational, economic, social, political, and cultural futures appear the most dim should be aided to become intellectual leaders in the classroom. Second, she stresses the notion of "learning community" rather than the teaching of isolated skills. Third, in forming the curriculum, teachers must borrow heavily from students' experiences beyond the school setting, thus making literacy acquisition more personally meaningful for them. Fourth, the definition of literacy must be broadly construed in the classroom; if an African American male, for instance, makes a comment about how it feels to live in a war zone, the teacher should allow the class to collectively discuss conditions in the local community. Fifth, the teacher should be committed to bridging the gap between the "real" and the "ideal". Lastly, in order to move away from cultural deficit models for explaining

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minority student failure, the teacher should engage in classroom activities that enable him/her to understand students' lives beyond the classroom.

### Reading, Writing, and Oral Literacy

Noll's (1998) research focuses on the role of multiple literacies (i.e., Native American culture, school culture, and mainstream popular culture) in the lives of two Native American students. She is interested in seeing what other contexts (besides school) students used oral and written language in, as well as what ways this language is important to them. Her observations and interviews with these students reveal that these students' identity issues are very complex, as they must exert a lot of effort in order to define their sense of Native American identity in settings such as the community and school, which are places where these identities are not always supported. In order to affirm this sense of identity, these two students revealed that they found themselves exploring the worlds of reading, writing, dance, and music in their community in order to explore their connections to the native culture and examine vital issues pertaining to discrimination, prejudice, and racism. Noll believes that if teachers draw upon knowledge in these students' communities, they may help bridge the gap that often exists between home and school for minority youths.

In an ethnographic study that examines the implementation of a multi-ethnic literature curriculum in two urban 10th grade classrooms, Athanases (1998) found that links between literary works and students' experiences have a significant impact on students' written and oral responses. Students recalled many family and personal experiences that influenced their literary preferences. In some cases, students reported that they identified with the feelings and/or experiences of literary characters. Students also linked their literacy experiences to their own adolescent concerns and struggles with such issues as peer group affiliation and feelings of isolation. The act of identifying culturally with events that

take place in literary works often instilled students with a sense of cultural pride and validation. The classroom discussions that revolved around the topic of identification also allowed students the opportunity to contemplate and develop their cultural and sexual identities. This study of students' responses to their readings of multi-ethnic literature recognizes the need to move beyond thinking about what should be taught in classrooms, and instead, look at how classroom lessons can be taught in such a way as to foster students' thinking about issues related to literature, culture, and identity.

Hence, a review of past and present research on the relationship between literacy and identity reveals that the relationship between identity and literacy should be seen as bi-directional. Furthermore, the relationship between different forms of literacy and identity has been documented in relation to a) reading only (Cherland, 1994), b) writing only (Horowitz, 1995; Ivanic, 1998), c) oral literacy (Bell, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1992), d) a combination of reading and writing (Henry, 1998; Puckett, 1992), and e) a combination of reading, writing, and oral literacy (Athanasas, 1998; Noll, 1998).

#### The Notion of "Book Club": A Possible Context for Examining the Relationship Between Literacy and Identity

As evident in the research of Cherland (1994) and Henry (1998), the relationship between literacy and identity has been explored in contexts such as "reading/writing workshops" or "book clubs". The latter type of activity, the notion of the book club, has been explored by various researchers (see McMahon & Raphael, 1997). Goatley (1997) explores literature-based instruction opportunities for special education students, such as using reading logs and drawing upon the assistance of "more knowledgeable others" such as teachers and peers in academic settings. In her work, she stresses the necessity of

teaching holistically, rather than focusing on isolated skills and tasks that may not relate so directly to students' previous experiences. In her study of second-language learners, Brock (1997) uncovers the ways that book clubs may be a significant context in which second-language learners "learn to mean" in English; that is, acquire ways of knowing and interacting that are appropriate in the school setting. In the book club setting, students are given opportunities to experiment with language in ways that are personally meaningful to them, such as creating mini classroom lessons and writing and talking about issues that they choose and consider to be worthy of discussion. She argues that this type of book club may be an effective literacy tool that can be used to supplement a quality bilingual program. Finally, Boyd (1997) examines the possibility of an alternative literacy context for low-achieving adolescents. The "Cross-Aged Literacy Program" is a book club program that allows these adolescents to engage in various literacy activities that differ from regular literacy instruction. They are placed in a situation where they are given ownership and responsibility for their learning, as well as the learning of younger elementary school aged children. This program opposes deficit models of literacy instruction by allowing low-achieving adolescents an opportunity to connect their personal experiences to literacy, and by focusing on their strengths when interacting with younger, less knowledgeable peers.

### Dissertation Study

Similar to the book clubs mentioned above, I examined the relationship between literacy (i.e., reading, writing, oral discussion, and media literacy) and bicultural identity through the formation of an after school literature club for high school students of Asian descent. In some ways, the club that I created was not

unique, in that it borrowed from and built upon the examples of book clubs that I described earlier (see McMahon & Raphael, 1997); however, the nature and purposes behind the activity that I developed were different.

My goal was to create a supportive literacy environment within which students could communicate and interact on identity issues that were pertinent in their lives. Using literature and movies by Asian individuals as a starting point for conversations about identity, I wanted to help students construct meaning in their own lives and experiences, as well as help them address their identity concerns by collectively brainstorming strategies that they could use to cope with identity-related issues. In essence, I wanted to provide them with the opportunity to voice issues and concerns related to their experiences growing up bicultural in the United States.

This literature club implemented a reader response approach to literature. Students were encouraged to take stances on the various pieces of literature that were read within the club. They were not only encouraged to make meaning of the text in its own right, but were encouraged to bring their personal experiences, attitudes, and knowledge to the text. Multiple interpretations of literature were not discouraged; rather, they were expected and celebrated (Spiegel, 1998).

By allowing students an opportunity to reflect on their personal identity issues in an academic-like setting (i.e., a setting that involves reading and writing, which are typically viewed as academic tasks in school), my overarching goal was to help students reduce potential tensions within their sense of bicultural identity. Through their participation in this club, I hoped that students

would be able to achieve a sense of developmental progress in relation to their identity; that is, achieve or progress towards a tension-lessened sense of bicultural identity, and during this process, find personal and cultural significance in relating their sense of identity with literacy activities that may be typically viewed as “academic work”.

### Contribution to Existing Research

#### Using multimodal forms of literacy

This dissertation study draws upon a) issues raised in various theories of identity, the home/school connection, the relationship between literacy and identity, and book clubs and b) my own experience (i.e., both personal and my practicum study) and proposes an intervention that specifically focuses on the role of literacy in helping students negotiate potential identity-related tensions between their home and school worlds. As evident in the review of literature on the relationship between literacy and identity, the majority of studies focus on the relationship between one type of literacy activity (e.g., reading, writing, oral literacy) and identity. This study contributes to existing research because it explores themes and patterns that emerge across multiple types of literacy activities (i.e., reading, writing, oral discussion, and media literacy) and examines their role in students' achievement or progress towards a tension-lessened sense of bicultural identity.

#### Developing a theoretical conceptualization of bicultural identity

This study also contributes to existing literature by furthering the development of a theoretical conceptualization of identity that more accurately

describes the identity development of bicultural individuals, and by extension, deepens our understanding of the impact of sociocultural and contextual components that guide all adolescents' identity choices and transitions between home and school. In my work, I argue that we can only understand the variation that potentially exists between bicultural individuals if we understand the relationship between the “core” and “periphery” of their identities. The “core”, which is similar to Erikson’s notion of identity, is constant across space and time. The “periphery”, which is similar to Gergen’s notion of identity, is debatable and changeable in nature, as it is more closely tied to the context in which one is participating. As isolated entities, the notions of “core” and “periphery” only offer us partial views of what identity may mean to individuals who find themselves negotiating between participation in two cultures. Earlier, in my practicum work, I argued for a new understanding of identity formation which acknowledges some elements or qualities of continuity that allow the individual to feel some sense of self sameness across context and time, yet also allows for some variation due to social and cultural changes in individual-context relationships.

The idea of simply combining the idea of a core and a periphery together in order to explain bicultural identity, however, is problematical, because developmentally speaking, this method does not allow us to understand the relationship between the continuous and malleable parts of one’s bicultural identity. Furthermore, the idea of combining Erikson and Gergen’s identity theories in order to better understand participants’ bicultural identity making

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processes separates the individual from the many social institutions in which he/she participates on a regular basis.

An examination of the relationship between the core and periphery of one's bicultural identity assumes that *all* participants have a core and peripheral sense of identity. Individuals will likely assign or attribute different things to the core and periphery of their bicultural identity, and/or may not make these distinctions so clearly; hence, bicultural identity making is largely an act of attribution on the part of participants, rather than an objective of where identity is located and what its origins are. Erikson and Gergen's theories approach identity from the standpoint of where it is located (i.e., within the individual or in a particular context). The theoretical model of bicultural identity that I propose uses the concept of attribution as an opportunity for a sense of individual agency, as identity, in my view, does not merely consist of a core or a periphery. It consists of a relationship between a core and a periphery, and the process by which one attributes different things to one's core and periphery explains the nature of one's bicultural identity development. For example, as an Indian American, I may attribute being Indian to the core of my identity, as being Indian is a state of being that is consistent across space and time; however, I may attribute being American to the periphery of my bicultural identity, as in some situations, such as at work or in the company of non-Indian friends, I may experience feelings of being American.

Furthermore, the degree of tension that one experiences within one's sense of bicultural identity is largely determined by the nature of the relationship



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between the core and periphery of one's bicultural identity. If the ideas that one attributes to the core and periphery of one's bicultural identity are similar, one will possibly not experience as much identity-related tension. By contrast, if the ideas that one attributes to the core and periphery of one's identity are very different, then one may experience a heightened sense of identity-related tension, as forming a sense of bicultural identity may require a stressful process of negotiation. Also, one's core or one's periphery is subject to change, depending on what one attributes to it. As a result, the process of negotiating between the core and periphery of one's bicultural identity may result in different ways of experiencing what it means to be bicultural. Hence, this study addresses and showcases the multiple ways by which bicultural high school students negotiate potential identity-related tensions in forming a sense of bicultural identity.

My view of the process of bicultural identity development contributes to past and present research as it enables one to have a sense of individual agency in the process of identity making. As stated earlier, this notion stands in contrast to Erikson and Gergen's conceptualizations of identity, which do not explicitly acknowledge the idea of individual agency. Erikson focuses on how the quest to develop a coherent sense of identity is lifelong, and manifests itself in a universal, invariant developmental sequence. Gergen, on the other hand, focuses on the role of social context and relationships in determining which identity one displays in a particular situation. The view of identity that I propose acknowledges that individual attribution of bicultural identity *is* bicultural identity.

### Studying the relationship between individual and activity

Furthermore, current literature on book clubs (See McMahon & Raphael, 1997) highlights a) the creation and implementation of particular types of book clubs and b) the experiences of students within these clubs. This study contributes to existing research in its emphasis on studying the *developing relationship* between an intervention and the experiences of the students who participate in it (Beach, 1995). In my practicum work, I argued that regarding the institutions of home and school as unitary and isolated forces that influence a bicultural adolescent's sense of identity would be undermining a) the historical relationship between the two institutions and b) the transformations that individuals may experience when moving between two institutions; hence, it became necessary to understand the notion of transition between home and school, and in turn, gain a better understanding of the developing relationship between the individual and these two institutions. Given the theoretical conceptualization of bicultural identity that I began to develop in my practicum, based in part on this notion of transition between the institutions of home and school, I believe that we cannot just study the individual or the club as separate entities. This study requires an analysis of both the creation and development of the club, as well as the various processes by which participants within the club negotiate potential identity-related tensions in forming a sense of bicultural identity.

### Understanding the identity experiences of a “model minority”

Lastly, this study contributes to existing research because it helps us better understand the complex bicultural identity experiences of high school students of Asian descent, who are commonly viewed as a “model minority” (Lee, 1994). Because they are often associated with academic achievement and success, their potential struggles with identity in relation to education have not been heavily studied, even though school plays a vital role in supporting identity development (Eckert, 1989; Lee, 1994; Wenger, 1998). This is an issue of concern, as I stress that we should not just associate tensions between different parts of one’s identity with lack of academic success (which has traditionally been the case in past research); identity conflicts may exist regardless of how these adolescents are performing academically, and this raises important educational and psychological implications for their identity development between home and school.

### Research Questions

In light of the issues raised above, the following research questions were examined:

- 1) How might we explain the varying nature of bicultural identity in theoretical terms?
- 2) What are the multiple ways that students of Asian descent achieve or progress towards a tension-lessened sense of bicultural identity in an after school literature club?
- 3) How do you create and sustain a literacy activity that facilitates the process of bicultural identity development? How might we describe relational change between individuals and the activity that has been created? What is my role in the creation and sustainability of this literacy activity?

Figure 2 Chart of Objectives

OBJECTIVE	RESEARCH QUESTION (S) THAT ADDRESS THIS OBJECTIVE	DATA BROUGHT TO BEAR
Create a supportive literacy environment within which students of Asian descent can communicate and interact on issues that may be pertinent in their lives, in multiple ways (i.e., through reading, writing, oral discussion, and media literacy)	How do you create and sustain a literacy activity that facilitates the process of bicultural identity development?	-Club discussion -feedback from two questionnaires
Help students reduce potential tensions within their sense of bicultural identity	What are the multiple ways that students of Asian descent arrive at or progress towards a tension-lessened sense of bicultural identity?	-Club discussions -written reflections -feedback from two questionnaires -interviews
Use culturally relevant literature and movies to help students construct meaning in their own lives and experiences	How do you create and sustain a literacy activity that facilitates the process of bicultural identity development?	-Club discussions -feedback from two questionnaires -interviews
To further develop my theoretical conceptualization of bicultural identity development	How might we explain the varying nature of bicultural identity development in theoretical terms?  What are the multiple ways that students of Asian descent arrive at or progress towards a tension-lessened sense of bicultural identity?	-Club discussions -written reflections -feedback from two questionnaires -interviews
Help students address their identity concerns by helping them brainstorm strategies that they can use to cope with identity-related issues	How do you create and sustain a literacy activity that facilitates the process of bicultural identity development?	-Club discussions

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

### Consent Procedures

In July 1999, I submitted an application to the University Committee for Research Involving Human Subjects (UCRIHS). Because participants in this study were likely be under the age of 18, I knew that I would have to seek both participant and parental consent in conducting this study. I decided that I would have students take a cover letter and consent form (see Appendix A) home that explained the nature of the study, and asked for a parental/guardian signature at the bottom of the form. I also underwent the necessary school board human subjects' approval procedures in the city where the study would take place.

### Pilot Study

In August 1999, I conducted a small pilot study with a group of three high school students who were of Asian descent. The purpose of this pilot study was for me to refine the ideas that I had articulated in my dissertation proposal, and assess whether or not the content and language within the questionnaires and interviews addressed the issues presented in my research questions. The pilot study was conducted over the course of 2 weeks in Michigan. I recruited participants from the site of my practicum research. I had them fill out the first questionnaire, and met with them for two 1 hour sessions and one interview each. These questionnaire and interview were identical to the questionnaire and interview that I was planning on using in the actual study; the two sessions were similar to some of the sessions that I would conduct in my dissertation study, so that I could get a sense of whether my plan for the two sessions and interview worked well, and if any changes needed to be made.

The pilot study took place as planned. At two different times, I had participants read a short story by an Asian author, and we discussed the selection with one another. The participants enjoyed the readings and were engaged during the discussion. The interviews also went well. After the interviews, I asked the participants if any of the questions were unclear or confusing. I made slight changes to questions that needed to be stated more clearly.

### Contacting Potential Research Sites

In December, I contacted two potential research sites in Michigan. I emailed contact people at both of these schools, explaining who I was, the nature of my study, and my reasons for desiring a particular school as a research site. Both teachers expressed interest, so I set up times in mid-January to meet with them in person at the school. During these meetings, I provided them with a more detailed overview of my study, and at one school, was able to meet with potential participants. I was also sure to discuss some important ethical issues, such as maintaining confidentiality about the data and the participants involved in the study, as well as the intended uses of my research (i.e., conference presentations, future publications). After meeting with individuals at both schools, I decided which school I wanted to conduct my study at, based on student interest and diversity.

### Participant Recruitment

In January, I distributed flyers that advertised my study to teachers at the research site (see Appendix B). In the flyer, I briefly described the nature of the club. I briefly mentioned the purpose of the club, provided the students with an overview of what types of activities would take place, and provided my contact information. One teacher informed students in her reading class, which contained many first generation Asian students, and the other teacher informed a group of



students who were already participating in an Asian cultural organization within the school.

I planned to offer an incentive for students who actively participated in the club. Students who attended most meetings, as well as filled out the two questionnaires and participate in the interviews, would receive \$50 in cash. I had originally planned on giving them gift certificates to a bookstore, but realized that some students would not be able to use them, because they were leaving for Asia at the end of the school year.

### Research Setting

The research site was a midwestern public high school. It is located in an upper middle class suburb in Michigan. This suburb is directly adjacent to a large public university, so a large number of students who attend the school have parents who are affiliated with the university, whether it be as professors or students. The high school is situated in a larger community that has six public elementary schools and two middle schools. During the 1999-2000 academic year, students of Asian descent comprised 7% of the total student population at this particular high school, which was 86% Caucasian (D. Miller, personal communication, August 29, 2000).

Data was collected over a period of four and a half months. At the start of data collection, I met with potentially interested students during and after school to answer any questions they may have about the club. I interviewed students during lunch and after school, prior to the start of club meetings. The after school club took place in Mrs. Sawyer's classroom. She was a reading teacher who had worked extensively with three of the participants of the club.

## Club Meetings

I set up a one hour block of time, once a week, in order to hold the club meetings. The club met at the school from mid January until the end of May 2000. The first meeting was an “icebreaker” meeting, where we did a “descriptive profile activity” (See Appendix C). This activity was aimed at exposing participants to their preconceived notions and assumptions about individuals of Asian descent. They were shown two photographs of Asian American individuals, and in pairs were asked to build a creative and descriptive profile of one of the individuals (i.e., guessing the individual's age, occupation, and other personal characteristics and qualities). This activity led to a conversation about the images that they and others associated with individuals of Asian descent. For subsequent meetings, I (on my own and with the input of club participants) chose literature (i.e., poems, short stories, and children books) that was a) by authors of Asian descent and b) dealt with issues that were particularly relevant to the experiences of individuals of Asian descent (see Appendices D and E for examples and a list of club readings/movies). I purposely chose literary works that could be read within the confines of a club meeting, and that did not contain difficult vocabulary words that first generation immigrant students may not readily comprehend. Furthermore, the chosen literature dealt with themes that may have impacted these high school students' identity development between home and school in varying ways, and in turn, had the potential of serving as a projective device into participants' identity experiences. For instance, Wen-Wen C. Wang's short story “Bacon and Coffee” explored the theme of intergenerational conflict,

through depicting a heated conversation between a second generation Asian girl, her mother, and her grandmother. Another short story, Longhang Nguyen's "Rain Music", described the experiences of a young Asian woman who was conflicted between dating a man who shared her cultural background and a man who did not. This decision was stressful for her, because it had direct implications for her relationship with her parents, who strongly desired for her to date the man who shared their cultural background. Both of the above mentioned topics proved to be relevant, in some ways, to participants' lives.

During meetings, we would often read together and discuss the pieces of literature that were chosen for a given week. If the pieces of literature were poems or short stories, I would provide some time for students to read in the beginning of the meeting, either independently or with the group. If the readings for a particular week were longer in length, I would ask students to read on their own time, and be prepared to discuss the longer work during the club meeting. During the course of earlier club meetings, I found that most students did not do the readings on their own time. Hence, I found the need to restructure club meetings in order for us to be more productive (see Chapter 4 for changes). During some of the meetings, students were asked to reflect and write in the form of a reader response or reflection, critique, poem, or narrative on their own experiences, and I collected these pieces of writing at the end of the club meeting. We also rented and watched two movies, *Joy Luck Club* and *Mississippi Masala*, and discussed them at some length.

### My role

I saw myself having dual roles in this study. On the one hand, I viewed myself as a researcher, analyzing students' responses to literature, as well as collecting data from various sources (see "Data Sources" section for more detail). On the other hand, I saw myself as a facilitator of a group of students whose cultural experiences were likely to be similar to my own. As a second generation Asian immigrant myself, I wanted to use my personal background and identity experiences as an analytic window in facilitating this club, something I would not have been able to do if I was studying another population.

### Participants

I recruited students of a) both genders and b) of 1st and 2nd generation immigrant backgrounds to the United States. This variability afforded the possibility of examining the multiple ways by which students of Asian descent negotiate potential identity-related tensions within their sense of bicultural identity. I targeted students who were in the later years of high school (i.e., 11-12th grade). I planned to hold the grade factor constant across my sample, because based on the results of my practicum research, I found that tenth grade students of Indian descent foresaw that most bicultural identity negotiations would take place when issues such as dating and receiving a driving license (hence, physical autonomy from family and home life) became topics of discussion between them and their parents in future grades, such as the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades.

I recruited students who represented a broad range of experiences as Asian individuals. By the term "Asian", I am referring to any student whose

cultural heritage stems from a country in Asia. Individuals of Asian descent represent more than 29 distinct subgroups who differ in language, religion, and customs (Sue & Sue, 1987), and factors such as reasons for migration, feelings towards the dominant culture, and experiences in both their native lands and the United States may cause their processes of identity development to differ tremendously from one another; hence, I recruited a mix of students with different Asian cultural backgrounds, as I wanted to a) uncover the different ways that these students negotiate potential identity-related tensions within their sense of bicultural identity and b) provide students with an opportunity to voice their diverse views as culturally different individuals of Asian descent, in opposition to the larger umbrella term “Asian”, which potentially undermines differences between groups from different Asian nations.

Participants were seven high school students who a) were interested in exploring Asian cultural issues and b) stated that they liked to read literature and express themselves in writing. Two of these students could be considered “core participants”, as they attended club meetings consistently over a period of time:

Sook: Sook was a first generation participant of Korean descent. She was one of the two core participants in the club meetings. Sook immigrated to the United States with her mother and sister in 1997. Her mother was pursuing a degree in counseling, and both she and her father wanted Sook and her sister to attend high school in the United States. Talkative and thoughtful, Sook participated in both interviews and all club meetings. She considered herself to

be “forever Korean”, and considered herself a visitor to the United States. Sook returned to Korea at the end of her senior year of high school.

Tina: Tina was a first generation participant of Nepali descent. She was one of the two core participants in the club meetings. Tina immigrated to the United States with her two brothers and parents in 1995. Her parents had decided to permanently settle in the United States in order to provide their children with higher educational opportunities. Quiet but thoughtful, she expressed that she considered herself “Asian American” because she needed to define herself this way in order to function effectively in the United States. She participated in both interviews and all but one club meeting.

The others were more peripheral participants, some who occasionally attended club meetings and some who did not attend any meetings, but nonetheless, were an important source of data in this study:

Sagar: Sagar was a second generation student of Indian descent. He chose to associate with a combination of Asian and non-Asian classmates. He considered himself “Indian American”, but believed that he experienced continuity (in terms of identity) in his experiences at home and in school. Sagar only participated in interview #1, because a schedule conflict (i.e., another after school club) prevented him from attending club meetings.

Anita: Anita was a second generation participant of Pakistani descent. She chose to associate with a combination of Asian and non-Asian classmates. She considered herself to be “American”, but also acknowledged that she sometimes “felt Asian”. Anita only participated in interview #1, because a schedule conflict

(i.e., a government-related internship) prevented her from attending club meetings.

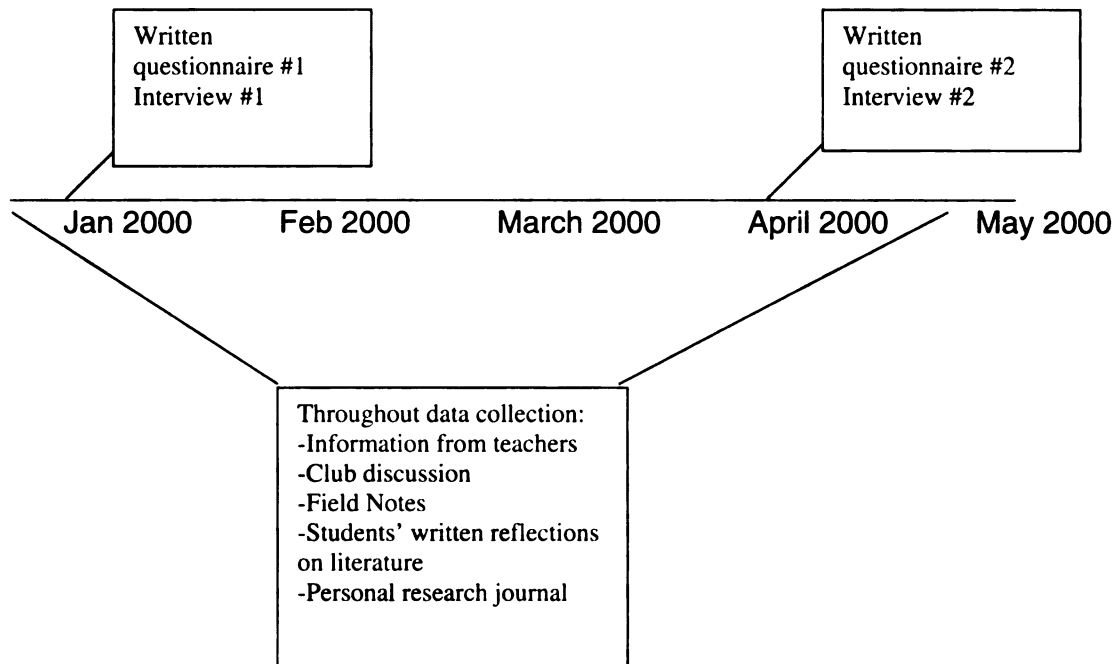
Girish: Girish was a second generation participant of Indian descent. He considered himself to be “Asian American”, and believed that he experienced continuity (in terms of identity) in his experiences at home and in school. Girish participated in interview #1 and two of the club meetings. His participation on the tennis team prevented him from attending more club meetings.

Ramesh: Ramesh was a second generation participant of Indian descent. He chose to associate with a combination of Asian and non-Asian classmates. He considered himself to be “American”, but also acknowledged rare instances when he “felt Asian”. Ramesh participated in interview #1 and three of the club meetings. His participation on the tennis team prevented him from attending more club meetings.

Wai-Ling: Wai-Ling was a first generation participant of Taiwanese descent. She and her brother joined her parents, who were already permanently settled in the United States, four years ago. She considered herself “Asian”, but acknowledged that she found aspects of American culture to be really appealing to her sense of self. Wai-Ling participated in interview #1 and about one third of the club meetings. Her reasons for skipping two thirds of the meeting are unknown.

## Data Sources

Figure 3: Timeline of Data Sources



### Written Questionnaire #1)

Questionnaire #1 (See Appendix F) was administered at the beginning of the data collection period. I used the first questionnaire to receive some general information, as well as to ask some initial questions about issues that I wanted to further pursue in the interviews. One of the purposes of the questionnaire was for me to learn more about students' level of identification with their native Asian culture (or parents' native culture) and mainstream North American culture. I included an "Identity Map" in the questionnaire, where participants were expected to name what they considered to be four influences on their sense of identity, and provide a detailed description of two of these four influences (See Appendix F). I



also wanted to gain an idea of how these students viewed the function of literacy (i.e., what kinds of literacy activities they regularly engaged in, specific pieces of literature that they had identified with in the past and reasons why, and the like). Lastly, I wanted to find out students' reasons for joining the club, what they wanted to accomplish by participating in it, and get some feedback about any suggestions that students had for the club itself. Both questionnaires presented a series of open-ended statements and/or questions and required the students to write their responses.

### Interview #1

I also conducted two interviews (see Appendix G) with the participants of my study. The purpose of these two interviews was to address specific issues related to my research questions, as well as probe into students' responses on the questionnaires. I used my interview protocols to guide the direction of the interviews, as well as to provide some structure to the process; however, because I was asking open-ended interview questions, I was prepared for instances where we could diverge somewhat from the original topic of the question. Furthermore, I asked students specific questions that pertained to their activities in the club, in order to learn more about these activities. I had all interviews transcribed by a secretary in the College of Education.

Interview #1 took place at the beginning of the data collection period, soon after the first questionnaire had been administered. This interview served as a preliminary informational interview, as well as a means for me to learn more about the reasons behind students' responses in Questionnaire #1. In this interview, I focused on two major domains: home and school experiences and identity.

- A) Home and School Experiences: I wanted to uncover information about how these adolescents viewed their transitions between

home and school, in terms of continuities and/or discontinuities in their actions, behaviors, and thoughts. In particular, I wanted to see what types of roles home and school play in the experiences of adolescents who shared similar native backgrounds, yet had often undergone culturally, socially and historically different past experiences.

- B) Identity: I wanted to gain an understanding of what factors influenced students' sense of identity, such as their cultural attitudes, behaviors, language experiences, views on tradition, values, level of identification with parents, and participation in certain cultural activities. I also wanted to learn about how students experienced identity in the midst of participation and negotiation between two cultures.

### Information from Teachers

In order to learn more about students' academic backgrounds, I requested information about academic performance and level of language proficiency from Mrs. Sawyer, a teacher who knew some of the students in the club.

### Club Discussion

I videotaped club discussions in order to document students' verbalizations, general or personal reactions, and interactions with one another during the club meetings. Because I knew that I would be accumulating a large volume of videotaped data, I planned to pick and choose which parts of video tapings would be transcribed. These transcribed parts reflected striking or poignant points in conversation, and also related to the themes and topics that I focused on in my data analysis. Hence, these video tapings were partially transcribed.

### Field Notes

I took notes during all of the interviews, in addition to audio taping them. I also wrote retrospective notes directly after each club meeting, as it would be distracting to take notes during the actual meetings.

### Students' Written Reflections on Literature

On occasion, students were asked to reflect and write in the form of a reader response, reflection, or narrative on their own experiences. I collected all of their pieces of writing. These written reflections were analyzed in light of the themes and topics that were a part of my data analysis.

### Personal Research Journal

I kept a personal research journal during the course of this project, which included my reflections about the project. In this journal, I expressed my emotions and thoughts about specific club scenarios and meetings, and attempted to find solutions for some of the challenges and conflicts that I encountered during the period of data collection. This journal was particularly important in relation to my third research question, as I was also studying my role in the creation and sustainability of this literacy activity.

### Written Questionnaire #2

This questionnaire, which was administered at the end of the data collection period, was a feedback questionnaire. It allowed me to learn more about a) what participants saw as the strengths and weaknesses of the club and b) the nature of their participation in the club. It also contained the "Identity Map", so I could see if students' perceptions of influences on their senses of identity had changed since the beginning of the club.

### Interview #2

Interview #2 took place shortly after I administered Questionnaire #2. In addition to elaborating on issues in Questionnaire #2, this interview allowed me

to revisit issues that were raised in Interview #1. In this interview, I posed questions that would help me see how participation in the club impacted/or did not impact their senses of identity. I asked questions that would help me uncover whether students demonstrate a sense of progress in relation their identity: that is, if they were able to achieve or progress towards a tension-lessened sense of bicultural identity during their course of participation in the club, and during this process, were able to meaningfully associate this sense of bicultural identity with literacy activities that may be typically viewed as “academic work.” This interview also focused on the topic of students’ literacy experiences in the club. I asked them to choose a couple of specific reading experiences and pieces of writing that they had enjoyed/not enjoyed in the club, and asked them to provide some detailed commentary about these literacy experiences.

#### Plans for data analysis

I planned to analyze similarities and differences in student experiences within the club. I decided I would code my data in terms of evolving categories that reflected themes and patterns that I consciously chose to address during the course of data collection. I planned to examine the multiple ways by which students arrive at or progress towards a tension-lessened sense of bicultural identity, particularly how different students experienced and negotiated participation in two different cultures in the process of forming their identities. Within this analysis, I anticipated that such issues as gender, generational status, perceptions of home and school, language proficiency, and views towards relationships would be important distinguishing factors in the multiple ways that

students arrived at or progressed towards a tension-lessened sense of bicultural identity.

I also wanted to gain an understanding of the varying degrees of tension that participants experienced in forming their senses of bicultural identity; in particular, who experienced high levels of tension, and who experienced comparatively lower levels of tension in their identities? Within this analysis, I anticipated some issues that may arise in relation to the nature of students' transitions between home and school. For first generation students, for instance, home may more closely resemble their parents' native culture (especially in the case of students who speak a different language at home), thus possibly broadening the gap between their home and school experiences; second generation students, on the other hand, may experience a home culture that represents more of a blend between their Asian culture and mainstream American culture, hence making their transitions between home and school less troublesome or stressful.

Lastly, I planned to examine issues related to change; for instance, I anticipated that conversations within the club may shift or change during the course of the academic year. The types of issues that emerge during these conversations, as well as students' emotional reactions to particular topics or themes were also subject to change. Because this study required an analysis of both the creation and development of the club, as well as the various ways that participants changed or stayed the same during the course of the club, I planned to analyze possible changes in the developing relationship between the

intervention and the experiences of students who participated in it. Finally, I planned to examine issues in relation to students' identities changing over time. In particular, did they exhibit more or less tension in terms of their identities at the end of the club? I anticipated that participation in this club may bring issues of identity to consciousness for some students who may not have reflected a lot on such issues before being in the club. These realizations could lead them in various directions: they could eventually achieve a sense of tension reduction, having worked through issues that were particularly troublesome in their lives. On the other hand, tensions and discontinuities that they had faced in their lives could become increasingly prominent as a result of participating in this club. It was my hope that participation in the club would leave students better equipped to deal with identity-related issues that may arise in their lives.

### Issues of Validity

In order to ensure internal validity, the following measures were taken:

- 1) Triangulation of data: There were multiple sources of data collected in this study, including written questionnaires, interviews, videotape of club discussions, students' written reflections on literature, a personal research journal, information from teachers, and field notes.
- 2) Repeated, long-term data collection at research site: This study took place over the course of approximately four and a half months at the same research site, with similar club activities and phenomena under study.

Although the intent of qualitative research is not always to generalize findings, but to form a unique interpretation of events (Creswell, 1994), I intended to discuss limited generalizability (i.e., issues of external validity) in relation to all adolescents' transitions between different "worlds" in their lives. As I stated

earlier, I stress the importance of not just looking at "bicultural identity" as a specialized type of adolescent identity, but rather, as a tool for examining identity making processes that are relevant to all adolescents. The use of bicultural identity as a lens into the home and school negotiation has the potential to deepen our understanding of the impact of sociocultural components that guide all adolescents' identity choices and transitions between home and school.

## CHAPTER 4: THE CREATION AND SUSTAINABILITY OF A LITERACY ACTIVITY

### Chapter Overview

In this chapter, I discuss a variety of issues and challenges involved in the creation and sustainability of an after school literacy activity. Through description and analyses of various “shifts” that took place in the activity over the course of four and a half months, I illustrate how the activity changed from being “school-like” to becoming “non-school like” in nature. These shifts exist in relation to the larger organization of the school, the lives of my participants, and my role as facilitator of the literacy activity. Lastly, I share some suggestions for how one may create and sustain a literacy activity that facilitates the process of bicultural identity development.

### My intentions in creating this club

My goal was to create a supportive literacy environment within which students could communicate and interact on identity issues that were pertinent in their lives. Using literature by Asian individuals as a springboard or starting point for students to comfortably discuss issues of relevance to their lives, I wanted to help students construct meaning in their own lives and experiences, as well as help them address their identity concerns by collectively brainstorming strategies that they could use to cope with identity-related issues. In essence, I wanted to provide them with the opportunity to voice issues and concerns related to their experiences growing up bicultural in the United States (through bringing their personal experiences, attitudes, and knowledge to the readings) .



### The Club Setting

The club met in Mrs. Sawyer's classroom at the high school. Her classroom resembled a typical school classroom, with rows of desks that faced a large chalkboard at the front of the room. I would set up a video camera on a stand in the front of the room, near the chalkboard, and place a box of pizza and drinks on a desk in the back of the room. At any given meeting there were usually no more than three or four people in attendance. Participants typically chose to sit in the middle of the room, and would shift the desks so we were all facing each other. In later meetings, participants would sometimes sit on top of desks, or on the floor. Also, one participant would usually grab the box of pizza and drinks and move it closer to us.

### A Typical Club Session

A typical club session would promptly begin at 2:45 PM. I would arrive a few minutes prior to the meeting, in order to set up the video camera and set out the pizza and drinks for the students. Usually, the core participants would already be in the classroom, conversing with one another or seeking academic assistance from Mrs. Sawyer. Each individual would grab a couple slices of pizza and a drink, and then sit at or on top of a desk. In the beginning of the meeting, we would often catch up on non-club related matters, such as general comments about how the week was going, emotional responses to events that had taken place during the school day, or particular assignments that students were working on in their classes.

Next, I would introduce the reading (s) for the day. I would preface our conversation by providing students with some context about the particular reading for the day. If we were reading a children's picture book, then we would take turns reading 2-3 pages each. I would make copies in advance, so each student had his/her own copy of the reading. Students would often comment on matters such as their emotional response to the story or agreement/disagreement with characters' actions during the reading portion of our club meeting.

After we were done reading, I would ask students for their general impressions of the book. After they shared their initial feelings and thoughts, I would gear the conversation towards two or three related topics that I wanted to discuss on that particular day. Discussion topics typically related to events or characters in the stories we read, and asked students to extend their understanding of the reading by applying similar situations to their own lives, or viewing a particular situation from a character's perspective. On days where students were very engaged in the reading, they would often talk extensively about their lives, sometimes making little or no reference to the readings. On days where students were not as engaged in the reading, I would often have to probe in order to get them to contribute to discussion. The latter scenario did not typically happen, however, because students were usually eager to explore and share their experiences with the group. At 3:45 PM, I would shut off the video camera, and we would walk out to our cars in the parking lot together.

### Shifts in activity

My purpose in examining shifts that took place in this after school literacy activity is to illustrate the dynamic and developing nature of the activity itself. As I will explain in later sections, I found that some of the initial plans that I had laid out changed quite a bit over the course of the intervention.

The overarching shift that took place was that although the activity physically took place in the school environment, it shifted further and further away from being “school-like” in nature. Some of the things that I hoped to accomplish, such as creating an informal atmosphere and encouraging students to openly discuss and explore identity-related concerns and issues, were not typically goals that are pursued in purely academic settings. Hence, because of my desire to accomplish such “non school-like” goals, it was inevitable that the activity changed from initially being “school-like” to becoming more “non-school like”. Next, I will describe some of the specific shifts that I witnessed over the course of the intervention.

### Formal to informal shift

Initially, I had a couple reasons for choosing to create an after school program. First, I wanted students to feel relaxed and comfortable when talking about issues related to their personal identities. Second, I wanted them to be able to find cultural and personal significance in relating their sense of identity to literacy activities that are typically seen as “academic tasks” (i.e., reading and writing).

The earlier meetings, in some ways, proved to be very “school-like”. By using this term, I am referring to the general ambience of the club. In the

beginning, I felt like the atmosphere was very formal. I would ask numerous questions, and students would raise their hands to answer. Often times, students would be very quiet and would appear hesitant to express their opinions, perhaps in fear of giving the “wrong answer”. This feeling of being in a typical classroom atmosphere was not meshing with my ideas of what an after school club should entail. I had envisioned a more casual atmosphere, where students could sit as they pleased (whether it be in chairs, on the desks, or on the ground), could eat or drink, and could speak informally about various topics. What I was initially experiencing, however, was very much the opposite.

This is the point that I realized that this club felt more like school than a club. I felt like I was struggling because what was supposed to be a fun, pleasurable, relaxing, and personally meaningful experience (that of the after school club) was feeling increasingly academic in nature, and seemed to be tiring students out (or maybe, boring them!). I have been asking myself, ‘how can I make this club less academic-like, when at its core, it involves reading and writing activities?’ This is a conflict that I have run into, and I feel like I need a quick solution, or mending remedy, otherwise these students are going to become more and more bored. I guess what is frustrating the most to me is the fact that these students chose to join the club (knowing full well what it involves), yet neglect to do the readings. Why is this? Is it because they are losing hope that this club is going to do anything positive for them, is it the dull routine of reading and interpreting and discussing together, or is it that they are simply busy with their schoolwork and can’t (or won’t) expend the extra energy, time, and effort?! I don’t know, but I do know that I must do something differently during the next meeting. Something to break the routine. Then, I will be able to better sense what the underlying issue is. (PJ<sup>1</sup>, 3/15)

This excerpt from my personal research journal captures my stressful feelings of discomfort in the earlier meetings. I knew that it was likely that students’ behavior during the early meetings was a function of being in a new setting which they associated with being in school. They tended to speak

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<sup>1</sup> Personal research journal

ambiguously about issues related to themselves and their personal lives. I found that I was revealing a lot more about myself than they were disclosing about themselves. Furthermore, in the beginning, I often felt like I was in the role of a teacher, leading the discussion and asking the students questions.

By this point, I felt like I was asking too many questions, and being really lecture-y. I guess that given the circumstances, I kind of had to be that way. This brings me back to the point that things felt too formal. I don't want students to feel like they are in class again. I know that they themselves do not want to feel that way. I think if they were sitting more comfortably, maybe I would not feel like it was an interviewish type of situation (PJ, 1/21)

Although I knew that the participants were probably in the course of adjusting to this new setting (which they were likely to initially view as “school-like” in nature), as well as getting to know me and one another, I was still hoping and striving to create a literacy atmosphere that was less “school-like”, and more comfortable and conducive to informal conversation. I believed that such a setting would enable students to express themselves more freely, and would prompt them to view me more as a peer than as an educator.

Over the course of the intervention, I witnessed this goal becoming more of a reality. Instead of sitting in desks, some participants opted to sit on top of desks, or lie on the classroom floor. They stopped looking at me to prompt them to speak, and began to openly divulge their feelings, thoughts, and opinions to the rest of the group. They exhibited a heightened sense of comfort as club meetings became less formal. Often, I found myself sitting back as they expressed conflicting opinions during a heated dialogue. I no longer felt that I was in the role of a teacher. Rather, I was regarded more as a club facilitator and

for some, a friend. This latter idea was particularly true with some of the participants who attended the club meetings consistently. Despite my attempts to make the club less formal in nature, however, some of the participants still acted like they were in school, and did not appear as comfortable in expressing their thoughts and opinions. Nonetheless, for the most part, I felt as if the literacy activity was in some sense, “moving away” from traditional notions of school, while still physically taking place in the actual school setting, and that consistent participants were finally becoming comfortable in this new setting.

#### Outside reading to in-club reading shift

The idea of reading literature and writing about it in relation to one's experiences was clearly stated in the consent form, flyer, and in verbal interactions I had with students during the first round of interviews. I anticipated that students who did not like to engage in these types of activities, or did not have the time to do so, would not choose to join the club. Participation in the club was strictly voluntary, and I anticipated that those students who did join would read regularly, and that we would be able to use the readings as a starting point for conversations about their own experiences with identity.

What happened in the earlier meetings, however, was quite different than I had imagined. There were times when only one student had completed the readings. During these meetings, I tried to provide other students with a summary of the poem or short story in order to spark conversation, but inevitably, the student who had done the reading, and I, would be doing most of the talking and discussing. On one day, however, only I had done the reading. It was

fortunate that I had the extra poems with me that day, otherwise we would not have been able to have a literature-based discussion. This unexpected experience helped prepare me for future meetings where students did not do the readings. During the next meeting (3/15), only one student had done the reading (which, by the way, was the short story *Doors*, that had been originally assigned for the week before!). I did not have any copies of extra poems with me, but had thought of an “emergency writing assignment” that did not require any reading on their part, and asked them to take out a piece of paper and write informally about the topic. Unfortunately, the club meeting did not go as smoothly as planned, partly because we were diverging from the usual schedule, and also because I could sense that some students were having difficulty with the assignment.

From these two experiences, I concluded that in order to get students to do the reading on their own time. I needed to redesign the club meetings so they would never have to do any reading outside of the literacy activity. I did not want the club readings to be “in competition” with their academic homework. We read together during the club meetings from that point on. During one of the first “redesigned” meetings, I brought in a children’s picture book called *Grandfather’s Journey*. The format of bringing in short stories dealing with bicultural issues and reading them together proved to be successful. It ensured that the reading was completed, and allowed for conversations that started on a common ground. It also made the act of reading seem more enjoyable and intrinsic in nature, as it was not treated like academic homework that “had to get done”!

Reading together during the club meetings was also a way for students to establish comfort and confidence. When I first brought in a picture book for us to read together, I was not sure how we were going to go about the task. Was I to do the reading, or were we to take turns? I had some reservations about bringing in children's books to read, because I did not want them to feel like I was treating them like young children, and most importantly, I did not want them to think that I believed they were incapable of reading the more complex pieces that I had brought in during earlier club meetings. Much to my relief, Tina immediately volunteered to share the task for reading. Eventually, Sook agreed to contribute as well. This approach worked well.

I am enjoying this format of taking turns reading. It is nice to see them so enthusiastic to read out loud, especially since English is a second language for them. At times, Tina struggles in her reading, but insists on continuing, because she enjoys it. That makes me happy to see. They are both really involved, talkative, and engaged. I am really going to miss them when this is over! (FN<sup>2</sup>, 4/19)

The students were not only enthusiastic about reading together, but they also liked the idea of reading picture books. Because of this positive response, we read three more children's picture books during the course of the club. The picture books dealt with a variety of different themes that we could relate to our own experiences, and were easy for the first generation students to read and comprehend.

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<sup>2</sup> Field notes



### Attempted focus on writing to multimodal forms of literacy shift

During an earlier club meeting, participants were not prepared to discuss the reading that I had given them the week before. I decided that any form of discussion would be futile if they had not completed the reading, so I assigned a writing topic: "If you were an Asian American writer writing a novel that captures the experiences of Asian teenagers growing up in the United States, what things do you think would be important to include?" When students were asked to write on this topic, they had varying reactions to the task. Some students took out a piece of paper and started to write quickly. Others, however, sat quietly and appeared reluctant to start writing. One of the first generation students, Sook, appeared to be confused by the question. I tried to explain it in more basic terms, but she did not appear to understand what I was saying. I noticed that another first generation student, Tina, kept whispering to the boy sitting in front of her. When I leaned forward to listen to what she was saying, I heard her asking questions about proper spelling and grammar. From this and one other writing experience, I began to get the feeling that the first generation students in the club felt more comfortable expressing themselves verbally than in writing. After the first month of meetings, two second generation boys who appeared the most comfortable with writing were no longer able to be a part of the club because of an athletic commitment. After they left, I decided to put the writing aspect of the club on hold. It ended up being a very small aspect of the overall club experience.

Furthermore, after they left the club, I decided that it was time for a break from the usual routine of reading and writing. At times, students appeared to lack energy and motivation to read and discuss the literary works that I brought to the club meetings. I decided to introduce a new activity in the club, in the hope of improving the nature of our limited interactions with one another.

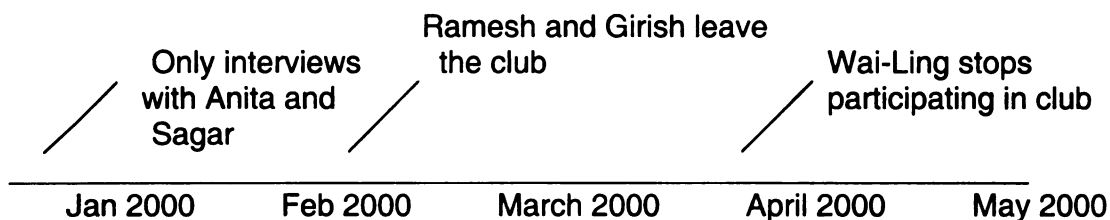
I don't know, but I do know that I must do something different during the next meeting. Something to break the routine. Then, I will be able to better sense what the underlying issue is. My quick "solution" is to show a movie clip next week. I think a movie is a good idea, because a) it will break the monotony and b) they will definitely have to watch it!! (so we have something to discuss). There are so many times that I find myself giving up hope with this project, but I keep telling myself, 'keep going and try new approaches'. I hope this approach works! (PJ, 3/15)

Over the course of the next couple meetings, we watched the movie *Joy Luck Club*, which is about four Chinese American women and their experiences growing up in two cultures. The students expressed a lot of enthusiasm and excitement over being able to watch the movie. They took their slices of pizza and laid down on the floor, as if they were watching TV at home. From time to time, students would make comments about the characters and plot of the movie. By the end of the club meeting, they did not want to go home! They wanted to finish watching the movie. We watched the second half during the following week, and had a small discussion about it. I could tell that although they were enjoying the movie for its entertainment value, they had also paid close attention to characters' actions and conversations. Later on in the club, we watched the movie *Mississippi Masala*, which is about an interracial relationship between a young Indian woman and an African American man. Once again, students reacted positively. I believe that this new approach worked well because students

enjoyed being able to relax at the end of the school day, and appreciated that we were engaging in an activity that was very different than what they did during a typical academic class. This activity also proved to be worthwhile for me, as the facilitator, because the discussions that we had after the two movies helped me uncover students' opinions and perspectives on issues related to identity. Hence, one major shift that occurred over the course of the club was a move from doing some writing assignments, which the first generation students did not appear very comfortable doing, to watching and discussing some movies and reading different types of literature, such as children's books.

Mixture of 1<sup>st</sup> generation and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation participants to only 1<sup>st</sup> generation participants shift

Figure 4: Student participation timeline



\*Sook and Tina participated during the full four and a half months of the intervention.

As indicated in Figure 4, the second generation boys left the club in March (due to another after school commitment); nonetheless, they were able to interact with the first generation students during the some of the first month's club meetings. Their attendance was not always consistent, while some of the first generation students attended virtually every meeting. It was during the course of the first few months, where I was able to observe the differences between how the first generation students behaved in the second generation students' presence, as well as instances when the group only included first generation students. In one "mixed" meeting, the first generation students were unusually quiet.

I feel like it was really tense and awkward at times. I could especially tell that Ramesh [second generation student] was trying to keep the conversation going. Sook [first generation student], who is usually very talkative, was very quiet. Wai-ling [first generation student] made maybe one comment. I am wondering if these girls are affected by the boys' presence, since they are not usually there. I am not sure if it is that they are boys, that they are a different generation, or if it is because they are almost strangers to them. I haven't really been able to gather a sense of this yet. (FN, 3/8)

After the two second generation boys left the club, three first generation girls remained in the club. The tone of the club changed dramatically when it just consisted of those girls. The girls became very talkative and engaged in the readings and movies. In one situation, it was apparent that Sook was glad that just she, her friend Tina, and I were at the meeting.

When we were about to begin the movie, Tina went to shut the classroom door. Sook then realized that no one else was coming to the meeting, and said, "Oh, it's just us!" I noticed that she seemed very pleased that it was just the three of us. I wonder why this is so..is it the level of comfort she feels with us, or the lack of comfort and ease that she feels around the

boys? Is it that she dislikes the boys? I am not sure, but I have noticed a pronounced change in her attitude when the others are not around. It is interesting to observe. (FN, 3/21)

Hence, it was obvious that for some reason, whether it be a function of discomfort or clash of interests, the first generation girls' patterns of engagement changed when the boys stopped attending the club. It is difficult to conclude whether this was due to differences in generational status or gender; but, in essence, they acted more freely and comfortably.

### Summary

In summary, there were some key issues involved in creating the club. Initially, some students were slow in returning consent forms and questionnaires, and it was difficult to find a suitable time and day for club meetings. There were also a number of shifts that took place as the intervention developed. Some of these shifts were initiated by me or the students, while others just appeared to unfold naturally. All of these changes led the activity to shift from being "school-like" to less "school-like" in nature. During the earlier club meetings, for instance, students behaved very formally, as they raised their hands if they wanted to answer a question. The atmosphere became more informal over the course of time. My original plan of doing reading and writing activities was challenging, as students often did not do the reading, and did not appear comfortable with the writing exercises. In order to ensure that students completed the reading, so we could use it as a starting point for discussion, I chose stories and poems that could be read together during club meetings. I also brought in two movies for us to watch and discuss, which students reacted to very positively. The atmosphere

became more comfortable and productive as a result. In the beginning of the club, there was a mixture of both first and second generation, male and female participants. By the end, there were only 1<sup>st</sup> generation female participants left.

### Discussion

In order for one to successfully create and sustain an after school literacy activity, I believe that the following suggestions are important to consider:

#### Make student involvement as self contained as possible

Four students came to the first club meeting. I had been anticipating that up to eight more students would come: some who I had interviewed, some who had turned in completed questionnaires and consent forms, and others who had expressed interest via email. Over the course of the first month, club attendance was surprisingly low and sporadic, given how many students had initially expressed interest. As a result, it became obvious that high school students have multiple commitments, both within and outside of school. Second generation students in particular, already had many of their social networks already in place. Hence, in creating an after school club, it is important to take students' busy schedules into consideration (i.e., making their involvement as self contained as possible).

Initially I had asked students to do many important things on their own, such as filling out a lengthy preliminary questionnaire and doing readings outside of club meetings. I quickly realized, however, that the most effective way of ensuring that these items were completed was by presenting them in other ways. For instance, I had originally asked students to fill out questionnaires and found

that they were very slow in filling them out. There were a number of possible reasons for this delay in response: some students had just finished exams the week before and hadn't had the time to look at the questionnaire and consent form. I also think that the length of the questionnaire complicated my chances of receiving quick responses from interested students. In effect, the beginning of club meetings was delayed because I had not received them. I realized later that it would have been much easier and more effective to ask the questions from the questionnaire during the first interview.

Furthermore, club meetings became a lot more productive when we read together. This collaboration ensured that students completed the readings, and that we had a common ground from which we could discuss and explore issues related to the text and our lives. It was far more productive than having students do reading on their own, outside of the club setting. Self-containment was an important factor in the creation and sustainability of the literacy activity.

### Be prepared for change

I was not anticipating that my plans for creating and sustaining this literacy activity would change very much. After all, I had carefully planned the details of the club in my dissertation proposal. Therefore, when I encountered new and awkward situations, I found it difficult to adjust to changes from my original plan. I found that I often resisted the possibility of doing things differently than I had originally envisioned in the beginning. For instance, during the course of the first month, few students came prepared to discuss the readings. My initial reaction was one of panic, though I stubbornly kept bringing readings to the club, hoping

that students would take them home and read them for the next meeting. I learned in time, however, that it was necessary to be prepared for possible obstacles, which often involved the creation of backup plans for meetings that could not run as originally planned. I would sometimes bring a set of “emergency poems”, or would prepare a topic that students could write about in advance. When these activities appeared to become monotonous, I introduced film to our club meetings. These activities often ended up sparking interest and wonderful conversations among members of the club. I realized that I could not always adhere to the rigid structure that I had outlined in my proposal, and that it was sometimes more useful and productive to tune in to students’ reactions and comments in order to decide on particular activities. I also realized that in trying to accomplish things that were “non school-like” in the context of a club, sometimes it was just necessary to let go and let events unfold naturally, such as showing a film and waiting to see how students would react to it. These instances eventually led me to view the literacy activity as developing, rather than fixed or static. I learned to anticipate struggles with my original plan, and how to adapt accordingly. During the process, it was necessary for me to continually reflect on my role and experiences as the facilitator of the activity in order to come up with more effective strategies for dealing with potentially problematic situations.

Last, but certainly not least, it is important to be aware of changing group dynamics and behavior in a club setting. Whether it be a function of gender, culture clash, or something else, the first generation female participants’ behavior was very different in the presence of the second generation male participants vs.



when they were the only ones present during a given club meeting. Although it is difficult to pinpoint an exact reason for this change in behavior (or perhaps, pinpoint the *many* possible reasons for this change in behavior that, unfortunately, due to the brevity of the second generation male students' participation as well as the lack of second generation female student participation, probably cannot be accurately assessed), it was quite apparent that the first generation female participants appeared more comfortable and talkative when they were only in the presence of one another.

This observation points to the importance of not only being in tune to group dynamics and differences, but also providing opportunities for students to interact with individuals whose backgrounds whether it be as females, males, or members of the first or second generation are similar to one another. For instance, Fennema (1987) found that female students are often more talkative and comfortable while participating in same-gender group activities in the classroom, and in some cases, may be more likely to assume leadership roles within the context of the classroom. Although it is difficult to deduce the exact reason (s) for the change in group dynamics and behavior, it would be helpful for us to anticipate the likelihood of such a change, and provide opportunities for students of similar backgrounds to converse with one another.

#### Encourage variety

I found that students really looked forward to discussing different topics every week. Whether it be topics dealing with personal relationships, family, or adjusting to a new culture, students were willing and eager to share their unique

perspectives. They enjoyed the combination of reading poems, short stories, children's books, and watching movies because they were never sure what to anticipate during each meeting. Furthermore, reading together in a non-threatening environment helped 1<sup>st</sup> generation students become more confident about their ability to read and communicate in English. I was able to gain a good sense of the various factors that play a role in their identity decisions and choices by addressing a variety of different issues through multiple literacy mediums.

#### Be a trustworthy and supportive facilitator

In order to create and sustain a literacy activity that facilitates bicultural identity development, it is necessary to be a supportive facilitator. Students need to experience feelings of trust and understanding in their interactions with the facilitator. Often participants are sharing personal stories that are private or emotional in nature. Three of the participants were recent immigrants to the United States, and often needed to talk through their frustrations about adjusting to a new culture, and dealing with issues related to speaking English as a second language. Sometimes students would embark on emotional journeys that would take us far from the readings, especially when they told painful stories about their experiences in transition. I felt that it was necessary for me to be supportive of such moments, and allow them a chance to voice what they were feeling inside. I felt strongly about making the club a "safe place" for students to discuss whatever was on their minds, and working with them to find effective ways to deal with particularly stressful identity-related situations. I feel that I was able to establish strong and trusting relationships with my core participants, who I got to

know very well over the course of club meetings by striving for this goal. The club did become “safer” over the course of time as a result.

#### Encourage personal connections to literature

It is important to encourage students to make personal connections to the literature that they read. In this literacy activity, literature functioned as a springboard or starting point for students to comfortably discuss issues of relevance to their lives. Its function often served as a buffer, because it allowed students to speak about their own views by espousing a particular character’s perspective, or talking about their own lives in reference to a particular event or situation in a given story. When I asked them questions, participants did not react to me as if they were being put on the spot because they were able to use the literature as a vehicle into their own experiences. The use of literature proved to be an effective means for my learning about their identity choices and experiences. It is likely that without the use of literature as a device into students’ experiences, it a) would have been more difficult and b) would have taken much longer for me to uncover students’ identity perceptions and experiences.

## CHAPTER 5: THE CONSTRUCTION AND EXPRESSION OF BICULTURAL IDENTITY

### Chapter Overview

According to LaFromboise, Coleman, and Gerton (1993), individuals who espouse a sense of bicultural identity “live at the juncture of two cultures and can lay a claim to belonging to both cultures” (LaFromboise, Coleman, and Gerton, 1993); however, an individual's sense of being bicultural may vary widely, depending on how he/she perceives the two cultures and the degrees to which he/she identifies with each (Phinney & Devich-Navarro, 1997). Hence, by definition, all participants in this study are bicultural, though individual perceptions of what it means to be bicultural vary. In this chapter, I a) describe participants' varying perceptions of what it means to be bicultural, b) describe the nature of the tensions they experience in relation to their bicultural identities, c) identify some of the major factors that influence participants' construction and expression of bicultural identity, and d) examine some cases of individual change and consistency over time, which involve the core participants (Sook and Tina) and me, the facilitator of literacy activity.

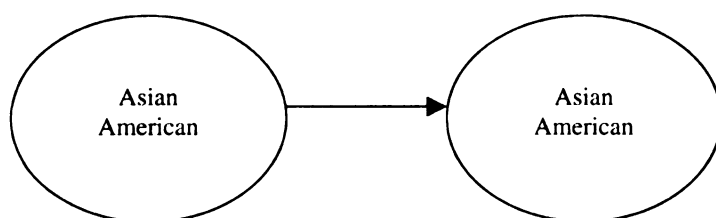
### What it means to “be bicultural”

In analyzing my data, I created a classification scheme for describing participants' varying perceptions of being bicultural. This scheme aims to provide a description of participants' different ways of expressing their bicultural identities. The four classifications that I will describe are *Being Both*, *Forever Asian*, *American at Heart*, and *Desiring Bicultural Competence*. It is important to

note that the four classifications in this chapter lie on a continuum, ranging from those who appeared to experience the least tension in relation to their bicultural identities to those who appeared to experience the most tension.

Figure 5: “Being Both”

Girish and Sagar did not make any distinctions between the core and periphery of their bicultural identities. They made consistent attributions to being “Asian American”, and indicated that they would like to be Asian American in the future.



Girish and Sagar did not appear to experience a lot of tension in relation to their bicultural identities. When asked about how they identified themselves, Girish and Sagar, who were two second generation participants, said that they considered themselves to be “Asian American”. As Girish stated,

Probably Asian American, because I have an Asian background, but I’ve been raised basically in America. I mean, I know a lot of our culture and things like that, but I haven’t really experienced it fully, so I guess I can say that. (Int<sup>3</sup> #1)

Sagar echoed this sentiment when he said that “I was born here but a lot of Indian traditions are still in my family” (Int #1). Although both acknowledged the two cultures that comprise their identities, they were not conscious of “code switching” in different contexts. Girish did not find himself drawing distinctions between the two cultures very often.

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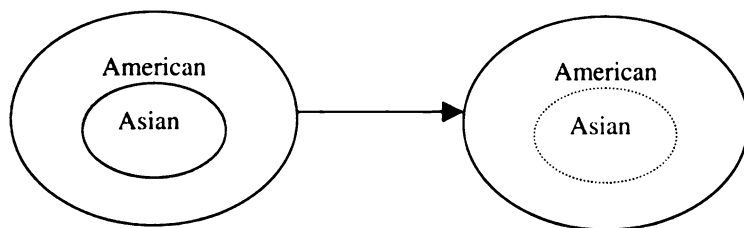
<sup>3</sup> Interview

I never really differentiate between being Indian and being American. I just kind of do whatever..I don't really know how to define acting Indian or acting American. I am always a part of American culture. It's not like when I go home I'm in India. (Int #1)

Furthermore, Sagar talked about how he did not feel like he ever had to balance between two different cultures. He stated, "It's not an issue 'cause I don't think about it. It's not like I am trying to be American or trying to be Asian. It's just the way I am" (Int #1). For these two participants, participation in two cultures did not raise any questions in their minds about how they may identify themselves. Both appeared to attribute being bicultural to the core and periphery of their identities, mentioning that there were elements of both cultures that influenced the way that they felt about themselves, and how they acted, behaved, and portrayed themselves to others. Hence, they did not appear to make distinctions between the core and periphery of their identities. As stated earlier, the "core", which is analogous to Erikson's notion of identity, is constant across space and time. On the other hand, the "periphery", which is analogous to Gergen's notion of identity, is debatable and changeable in nature, as it is more closely tied to the context in which one is participating.

Figure 6: “Forever Asian”

Sook attributed being “Asian” to the core of her bicultural identity. She attributed momentary challenges, such as her transition to the United States, the process of learning a new language, and being viewed as a foreigner to the periphery of her identity. It is important to note that she did not find these challenges as being potentially threatening or identity-changing, because she was returning to Korea at the end of the academic year. Nonetheless, she wished that in the future, her experiences in mainstream American society would be less stressful, as indicated by the dotted lines.



Sook, who experienced minimal tension in relation to her sense of bicultural identity, described herself the following way:

I'm an Asian and I'm Asian forever. I have two cousins and they are living in Boston. They were not born here, but moved here when my older cousin was three years old and younger cousin was eleven months. They think they are American. They can speak Korean, but not really. They think they are American. Not me. (Int#1)

Sook was “forever Asian” because she assigned being Asian to the core of her identity; for her, being “forever Asian” was a continuous identification that did not change across different contexts. She did not experience any conflict or confusion over her sense of cultural identity, because she did not fully identify with mainstream American culture. Instead, she viewed herself as a foreigner who faced minimal tensions in relation to her sense of bicultural identity, as she

would soon return to her homeland. This idea becomes apparent in the following statement:

Sometimes I feel so sad. I know I am in a foreign country. I always say that if someone doesn't treat me well, I have to accept that I am in a foreign country and I am a guest. When I go back [to Korea], they can't treat me that way. (CM<sup>4</sup>, 2/16)

Having only been in the United States for two and a half years, Sook felt that she was a guest in a new country. She was "forever Asian" because she was not born or raised in the United States. When asked if she would have felt the same way about her sense of cultural identity if she had immigrated to the United States in middle school, her response was very different.

If I started to be educated here and was born here, maybe not. My parents would be Korean and try to teach Korean culture, but the trouble is, I would spend more time with Americans in school and everything, and then, I probably wouldn't be a real Asian. I'd probably be a combination. (Int #1)

Hence, in part, Sook attributed her lack of strong identification with American culture to a lack of time spent living in the United States and her plan to return to Korea; however, although she did not strongly identify with mainstream American culture, she still considered herself to be bicultural to a certain extent, as revealed in the following conversation:

Sook: I have to figure out how I'm going to live and how I'm going to express myself as 'some Korean', but being in America.

Sapna: So you see yourself as more of a Korean person, forever a Korean person, but you're in America; but the American part of it is not really a part of you...

Sook: Not a part of me, but a part of my life. (Int #1)

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<sup>4</sup> Club meeting



According to Sook, being bicultural meant having the ability to function effectively in both cultures. She attributed her ability to function effectively in American society (e.g., feeling comfortable and being able to express herself in English) and, in her own words, the idea of having America be “a part of my life”, to the periphery of her identity (i.e., those traits or abilities that were more adaptive or public in nature). The relationship between the core and periphery attributions was stress-inducing at times, particularly in situations where people treated her as being different, or if she had difficulty communicating her thoughts in English, but did not lead to tension in terms of how she identified herself. She felt that she could express herself the way she wanted to, as evident in this conversation during a club meeting:

Sapna: As first generation individuals, did you find that you had to be a certain way, act a certain way to function effectively here?

Sook: It's like a fruit salad world...everything has its own taste and is its own way

Sapna: You don't feel forced to conform or anything like that?

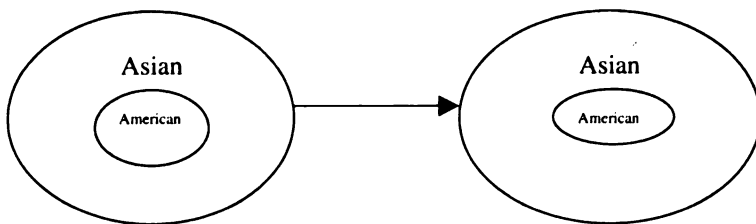
Sook: No. (CM, 3/8)

We were discussing *What's in a name?* by Rashmi Sharma in this conversation. The author draws an analogy between society and a fruit salad in this poem. After reading the poem, students at the club meeting tried to differentiate between a “fruit salad” and “melting pot” ideology. Sook drew parallels between the poem and her life, and concluded that she did not feel any pressure to assimilate into American society. Through reading and discussing this poem I was able to gain some insight into Sook's identity decisions.

This lack of tension could have been largely due to the fact that she knew she was returning to Korea at the end of the school year. Therefore, even though she always considered herself to be Asian, she perceived a need to adopt or incorporate elements of mainstream American culture into her way of life, because she would be living in the United States until her high school graduation.

Figure 7: "American at Heart"

Anita and Ramesh attributed being "American" to the core of their bicultural identities. They made fewer references to the Asian aspects of their identities, which they attributed to the periphery. More specifically, they attributed a sense of "cultural recovery" to the periphery, or a desire to retain some aspect of their parents' native culture, although they did not consider it to be central to how they defined themselves. Both Anita and Ramesh indicated that they would likely define themselves the same way in the future.



Participants who were "American at heart" experienced few tensions in relation to their senses of bicultural identity. Both Ramesh and Anita were second-generation individuals who acknowledged their parents' native culture, but did not identify strongly with it. As Ramesh said, he was "an Asian in background and religion, however an American in my daily life and habits" (Q<sup>5</sup>#1). Furthermore, both participants did not perceive their participation in two cultures as being equal. They overtly identified more strongly with being American. Anita stated,

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<sup>5</sup> Questionnaire

I view myself as an American. I really honestly do not feel any ties to Pakistan or 'Asianness' at all, which I sometimes feel bad about 'cause it's my country, but I really don't care. I haven't really interacted with them. I'm not planning on going there to live or anything. I don't watch Indian movies. I don't listen to Indian music. I can't stand them. I'm in some ways more American than other people. Like, I always wear red, white, and blue on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. I'm so patriotic. I'm so excited to vote, because I just registered. And so I'm all about America. (Int #1)

Both Ramesh and Anita described their stronger identification with mainstream American culture as being a conscious choice. In describing Rashmi Sharma's *What's in a Name?* a poem that we read in the club, Ramesh wrote the following:

The second paragraph states that your name determines who you are, Indian or American. But I have not related this [idea] to my name because no matter what your name is, you are who you make yourself out to be. (WR, 3/8)<sup>6</sup>

Although he had grown up amidst two cultures, he stressed the idea that he had personally chosen to identify more strongly with one culture, the way that Sharma described in her poem.

Although both Ramesh and Anita attributed being American to the core of their bicultural identities, they both acknowledged that there were situations where they "felt Asian". As Ramesh stated, "I think for certain stuff I'm Asian, but on a regular basis, I'm American" (Int #1). Furthermore, when asked if she ever "felt more Asian" in particular situations, Anita answered,

I really feel Asian when I'm around a lot of other Asians in a white-filled area, like if I hang out with a bunch of Asians at school, I really really feel it; but if I'm just with other people, just random people like a mixed group of people, I don't feel at all. It's not something I think about at all. (Int #1)

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<sup>6</sup> Written reflection on literature

Hence, for these two participants, being bicultural often involved attributing feelings of “Asianness” to the periphery of their bicultural identities.

The relationship between the core and periphery of these two participants’ identities, however, differed. Anita revealed the identity-related tensions she experienced when talking about how she had attempted to balance between participation in two cultures.

I’ve mostly tried to throw away the other culture. While growing up, I didn’t want to be associated with ‘Asianness’ at all; but now I am trying to balance, not with the Asian part exactly, but the religious part, because I have started covering my hair. I am trying to incorporate so it is less noticeable wearing stuff like that. A lot of Muslim people, when they start covering, they wear those scarves that don’t match and are weird prints, and I feel so bad. Look what they are representing, or being. (Int #1)

Anita, who was self-conscious about her appearance, was particularly sensitive about how others treated her. She came from a religious Muslim family in which all of the older females wore *hijab* (scarves) on their heads. Even though she wore *hijab* and participated in Islamic rituals, however, she considered herself to be American. When others did not consider her to be American based on her appearance, she would experience some tension. As she said, “it truly insults me when other people think I’m not American and wasn’t born here...they think I am less of an American just ‘cause of the way I look” (Int #1). Hence, for Anita, the nature of the relationship between the core and periphery of her bicultural identity was sometimes slightly problematic, though others’ comments and perceptions did not lead her to change her core perceptions of herself.

For Ramesh, on the other hand, the nature of the relationship between the core and periphery of his bicultural identity was not problematic or stressful. This

idea was revealed in one of the club meetings, when we read a story called *Homecoming*, by Ching-Fei Chang. In this story, a young woman named Su-Lin receives a lot of academic and social pressure from her strict, traditional father. He is unhappy about her choice to major in English, and does not appear to agree with her academic and career-related life choices. While discussing this piece with the group, Ramesh shook his head in disbelief.

Ramesh: I don't feel pressure because I have gotten past that. They [parents] don't influence me any more

Sapna: You mean, they don't bug you?

Ramesh: No, they just don't influence me. (CM, 2/16)

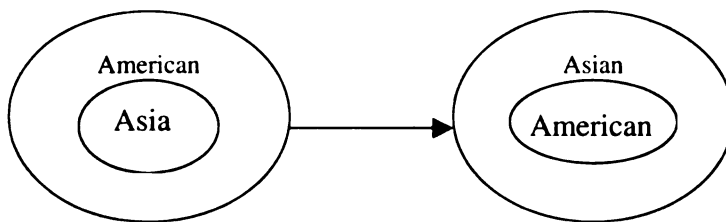
Ramesh drew personal connections to the text, because he put himself in the shoes of the main character. However, his experiences with pressure and tension were markedly different than hers. While she internalizes her father's harsh and strict words and often appears to feel torn between her father's expectations and what she desires for herself, Ramesh did not appear to place as much importance on what his parents had to say to him in similar situations. He did not appear to experience this sort of tension between the core and periphery of his bicultural identity because he did not allow other individuals, such as his parents, to challenge or question his sense of identity.

Both Ramesh and Anita sometimes experienced feelings of being Asian, and attributed these feelings of being Asian to the periphery of their bicultural identities when participating in Asian cultural or religious rituals, or spending time with Asian classmates. In their daily lives, however, and in interactions with their culturally heterogeneous groups of friends at school, they did not experience a

deep sense of attachment to their parents' native culture. They attributed "being American" to the core of their bicultural identities,

Figure 8: "Desiring bicultural competence"

Like Sook, Tina and Wai-Ling attributed being "Asian" to the core of their bicultural identities. They also attributed momentary challenges, such as their transition to the United States, the process of learning a new language, and being viewed as a foreigner to the periphery of their identities; however, given that both participants' families were planning on settling in the United States, their "American" peripheries could, in one sense, be described as an "identity goal". Both of them stressed the importance of being able to function effectively in the United States, and to become comfortable with aspects of mainstream American culture that were different than what they were accustomed to back in their native countries. Hence, in the future, they hoped that they would be able to attribute being "American" to their core identities.



Tina and Wai-Ling appeared to experience the most tension in relation to their bicultural identities. They were both first generation individuals who had been in the United States for four years. Both of their families planned to reside in the United States permanently. In their transitions to the United States, both revealed that they were conscious about feeling different than others. Tina revealed this sentiment in the first interview:

Sapna: Is it really difficult for you? Do you feel the need to act differently?

Tina: Very uncomfortable. They are different and I am different. We are all human, but you know, our society is different in Nepal. In America, they have a different society, so I don't mix in too well (Int #1)

Wai-Ling expressed similar feelings, and stressed that when one feels so different, one really wants to fit into mainstream society. She said that "...when you come over here, you are so different than everyone else. You don't want to feel different. You want to fit in" (CM, 3/8). This desire to feel more at ease in American society appeared to fuel their desire to be bicultural. Although they appeared to attribute their native cultures to the core of their identities, they expressed a need to learn more about their new culture, and hence, be bicultural.

Sapna: Why would you consider yourself both Asian and American?

Tina: Nepal is my hometown. I grew up there, and I knew a lot in Nepal; but now, I've moved to America and this is a lot different. I have had a hard time adjusting. I think I am going to stay here, because I have to graduate from the university or college here, so I need to learn other different cultures. I want to be both. (Int #1)

According to Tina, she had to consider herself "Asian American" because although she was born in Nepal, she now lived in the United States. Although she attributed being Asian to the core of her identity, she acknowledged that there was a periphery to her identity as well. Processes such as the stressful adjustment, becoming comfortable expressing oneself in a new language, and understanding the values of American society were issues that she was going to have to deal with in order to adapt to this new country, and in turn, they constituted the periphery of her identity. The nature of the relationship between the core and periphery was often stressful, not only because she was adjusting to a new culture, but also because she knew that her family was planning on settling here permanently.

Despite this tension, however, Tina was quick to draw distinctions between herself and "them" (Euro Americans). This latter idea became apparent

in her interpretation of the short story *Homecoming*. In the story, Su-Lin's father is often very strict and harsh with her. When she was younger, he became enraged when she was watching television without his permission. He did not typically allow his children to watch television unless they were watching a news program. As Su-Lin fumbled to come up with an excuse for why she had been watching television, her father started to yell and threatened to spank her. She retorted by saying "We're in America, Ba-ba! You can't spank me-if you do, I'll report you to the police for child abuse!" (p. 47). He replied that if she wanted to be considered "American", he would treat her like an "American": at the age of eighteen, he would make her leave the house and would no longer support her financially. He took out a piece of paper and made her sign a "contract" that she would leave the house at eighteen. When she did eventually turn eighteen, he made her leave.

Tina believed that the father's actions and behaviors reflected an "American way" of dealing with situations: "I think her dad was mean to her because now he is in a different place, he is in America. His mind is like an American person. He knows the American way" (CM, 2/16). Hence, Tina viewed the father's actions and behaviors as being situational. According to her, it was likely that the father would not have reacted the way he did, had he been back in Taiwan, his native land. This quotation revealed how she drew connections between her experience and the text, through distinctions between "them" and "us", and lends support to the idea that although she was now in the United



States, Tina did not experience any tension in defining where her loyalties were, amidst participation in two cultures.

For Wai-Ling, these distinctions were not quite so clear. After spending more time in the United States, she expressed more confusion about her sense of identity, saying that she was often perplexed about who she was. As she wrote during one of the club meetings,

My name, in Chinese, is Wai-Ling Chiang, and most people cannot say it when they first hear it. They are always like, 'Whale-ing'? 'Wheeling'? It sometimes bothers me. I'm proud of who I am, but when other people say my name wrong, it makes me feel like I'm a joke. I think about giving myself an English name, but if I do, what about my pride? Am I giving it up? My name represents my heritage and my culture. If I change it, will I lose my identity? I have already picked out a name, now, I just need to decide if I really want to change it. (WR, 3/8)

Though she appeared to attribute being Taiwanese to the core of her identity, she found that many aspects of mainstream American culture challenged her previous sense of self. Unlike Tina, however, she was more comfortable in her adjustment to a new culture, and found some aspects of the culture to be appealing. However, this period of adjustment was not without challenges to overcome:

During one club meeting, we discussed Longhang Nguyen's *Rain Music*. This short story is about a young woman named Linh who is torn between dating two men: a kind, academically ambitious young man named Thanh who shares the same Vietnamese cultural background and an intriguing, less financially stable young man named David who does not happen to share her cultural background, but nonetheless, shares a lot of similar personal interests. She

knows that her parents would be devastated if they learned of her involvement with the latter young man, because he does not “fit their mold” of a future husband for their daughter. The first young man, however, epitomizes all of the personal and cultural qualities that they would value in a mate for their daughter.

After reading this story, Wai-Ling was quieter than usual. She appeared to be deep in thought. Finally, she spoke out loud.

When I was reading this story, I could kind of relate to this story. There is this guy I like who is from Taiwan, and my mom has problems with it because things are really different between China and Taiwan. He has a different family background too. Then there is this Taiwanese guy who has the same background who goes to UM, and is in the medical field. This other guy from China, he doesn't really have a nice family background. (CM, 5/3)

In this excerpt, Wai-Ling demonstrated that she could relate to the story because she was undergoing similar life circumstances. She was torn between two young men: one whose company she really appeared to enjoy, and another young man who her parents found more desirable. Although he was Asian, the young man that she liked did not share her Taiwanese background. This was a problematic issue for her parents. I later learned from Wai-Ling that they overtly disliked Chinese people. For Wai-Ling, this story served as an appropriate starting point for discussion about her own experiences.

Hence, the desire to be allowed to embrace some non-traditional ways of being, such as dating someone of a different cultural background, was central to the periphery of Wai-Ling's identity. The nature of the relationship between the core and periphery of her identity was very stressful at times, not only because she found aspects of mainstream American culture to be appealing and

sometimes conflicting with how she originally had viewed herself, but also, because her parents did not support her “nontraditional interests.”

This latter idea was also made explicit in an earlier meeting, when we were discussing Wen-Wen C. Wang's *Bacon and Coffee*. In this short story, a young Chinese woman is having breakfast with her mother and grandmother. Her mother is constantly criticizing things about her, such as the blonde streaks in her otherwise dark hair, the fact that she is playing her radio very loudly, and that she chooses to buy vegan bacon instead of real bacon. When the daughter bluntly announces that she is engaged to marry a Euro American young man, her mother and grandmother are outraged at what they perceive to be a lack of regard for their cultural background. The young woman does not change her point of view throughout the course of the conversation. The conversation escalates into verbal attacks and generational clashes between all participants, including the mother and grandmother.

The young women who attended this club meeting really enjoyed this piece, and talked about how they saw themselves in different characters' roles. Wai-Ling, who was perhaps the least traditional in her thinking, strongly identified with the daughter in the story. She said, “I think I am more like the daughter...I mean, I dyed my hair and my parents did not like it.” (CM, 2/9). Tina, by contrast, who was most traditional in her thinking, was outraged with the daughter's reaction to her grandmother, in particular. She felt that the daughter was disrespectful to her elders, and should listen to what they have to say. “If I was that girl,” she said, “I would stay home and listen to my grandmother” (CM, 2/9).

Through our conversation about this piece, I was able to uncover key differences in Wai-Ling and Tina's thinking, which influenced how they defined themselves in relation to the cultures that were a part of their lives.

Hence, for Tina and Wai-Ling, the process of lessening tensions within their sense of bicultural identity was not free of complications. Wai-Ling often felt torn between being Taiwanese and having the desire to incorporate aspects of her new culture into her sense of self. Tina did not appear to experience this particular tension, but appeared to have a more difficult time adjusting to the United States. Because of this difficulty, she appeared to identify more strongly with her native culture, though she admitted that she wanted to learn more about mainstream American culture. Therefore, just like Sook, both Tina and Wai-Ling felt the need to be bicultural to function effectively in the United States.

#### Summary: Bicultural Classifications

In summary, although all participants of this study were bicultural, what it meant to be bicultural varied widely, and in effect, produced varying degrees of identity-related tension. Girish and Sagar considered themselves to be bicultural "Asian Americans", and stated that they were not conscious of differentiating between the two cultures that comprised their identities. Sook, who experienced some tension between the core and periphery of her identity, identified most strongly with her native Korean background. Ramesh and Anita identified less with their Asian roots and more with mainstream American culture, expressing specific reasons for this conscious choice, such as not being able to identify with particular values, customs, and ways of being associated with their parents'

native cultures. Anita experienced some tension in how she viewed herself vs. how others viewed her. Tina and Wai-Ling, though recent immigrants who identified strongly with their native cultures, were eager to learn more about mainstream American culture and to feel comfortable participating in both cultures simultaneously, facing their own unique challenges in the process. As we can see from these participants, there is a wide range of bicultural identification in this study. Although all participants are, by definition, bicultural in origin, they appear to make different judgments about the nature of their bicultural status, and negotiate identity-related tensions in varying ways.

#### Factors involved in the construction and expression of bicultural identity

As apparent in the questionnaires, interviews, and club meeting data, there are several key factors involved in the construction and expression of bicultural identity.

##### Friendship

One of these factors is friendship. For Sook, true friendship could only exist when she was in Korea. As she stated, "In Korea, we have deeper relationships. We know everything about the friend. Americans and non-Asians have different definitions of 'friend'"(Int #1). Hence, for her, friendship was inextricably tied to her feelings of being Korean. Not only did she identify most strongly with being Korean, but her feelings towards friendship reflected this identity choice. Unlike Sook, Wai-Ling, who was also a first generation participant, had a difficult time defining who she was in the transition between her native culture and mainstream American culture. The following conversation

demonstrated the importance she placed on spending time with individuals who allowed her to feel most comfortable:

Wai-Ling: I feel more comfortable hanging out with Asians.

Sapna: Why?

Wai-Ling: I don't know, it's really weird. We have more stuff to talk about. We have the same background and we can talk about that. They all know what you are talking about. Non-Asian classmates look like they have no idea. (Int #1)

Therefore, Wai-Ling preferred spending time with individuals who shared similar backgrounds to her, as these individuals served as a source of comfort during her difficult transition. Some second generation participants also articulated this desire to spend time with individuals who shared similar cultural backgrounds. As Anita stated,

... outside of school, all my friends are Pakistani girls. I usually have the most fun with them because they grew up here too. And they are like in that same weird limbo area so they understand both cultures and you can do just everything and say stupid things and they'll understand any sort of joke you make. (Int #1)

Girish felt the same way.

I feel like it is easier to talk to people that are of the same background...you can relate to more things, like how our parents are compared to American parents or a different kind of parents. Just the way things go. We also meet a lot at the temple and cultural activities. (Int #1)

Regardless of what it meant to be bicultural, for some participants it was easier to be friends with peers who had undergone similar life experiences as Asian teenagers growing up in the United States. They could relate to these peers on a personal and cultural level, and express themselves more freely than they could with other peers.

## Family

According to the participants of this study, parents were often an important influence on their sense of identity. Parents taught them values, morals, and ethics, and often looked out for their best interests. Furthermore, the cultural tensions inherent in being bicultural became apparent in conversations about parents. As Wai-Ling stated,

My parents feel like planning my future for me. Ok, you are going to go on to college. You have to go to college and then you will become a doctor, and get married. Sometimes I feel like I want to be American, because I want to be like my friends. They can go out, and they have the right to make decisions when they want to and stuff. Mine [parents] always say, "No, you should do this and you should do that. We have planned everything for you. You just have to follow through." (Int #1)

For Wai-Ling, the tension she experienced between feeling Asian and American became very apparent in her interactions with her parents. They had already devised a plan for her future, and she was resentful because she felt that she did not have a say in what happened. In this particular situation, she identified more strongly with how she perceived American parents dealt with similar scenarios: encouraging their children to be autonomous and allowing them to make independent decisions. Girish echoed this sentiment in the following statement about parents:

Your American friends, they are just like "All right Mom, I am going out"...and they're [Indian parents] are just like "Ok, what time are you going to be back? Call me, what's the phone number there?" I guess that's just being cautious or safe, but after awhile, you kind of get past that. You feel like, "I'm older than that now." (Int #1)

Hence, Girish also identified more strongly with what he perceived was a “more American” way of dealing with parents.

Tina, on the other hand, expressed that she had a more traditional viewpoint when it came to matters that involved parents. This idea became apparent when we watched the movie *Mississippi Masala*. Tina repeatedly commented on Meena’s, the main character’s, actions and behaviors. Meena, who is of Indian descent, falls in love with an African American man. Much to her family’s dismay, she dates him and eventually decides to leave home to be with him. Tina was not pleased with Meena’s decision, as reflected in this conversation:

Tina: I didn’t like the end.

Sapna: You didn’t like the end? Why?

Tina: You know his daughter should not do that..running away from her family.

Sook: I can understand that

Tina: I can understand that too. Parents are parents. First come parents, then boyfriend, or whatever. (CM, 5/17)

Hence, Tina did not agree with Meena’s decision to leave home to be with her boyfriend, because this decision did not mesh well with her own values. She believed that one should be obedient to one’s parents, and should place more importance on them than anyone else.

Lastly, Tina also mentioned how her siblings influenced her desire to embrace both Nepali and mainstream American cultures.



Sapna: How about your brothers? How have your brothers influenced you?

Tina: They want to be both Nepali and American, and they want to learn. I mean, they want to stay here and learn the culture too.

Sapna: How have they influenced you?

Tina: They told me, 'you have to do both', because if you don't, you cannot settle in America... (Int #1)

Tina, who had struggled in her transition between two cultures, often revealed a stronger identification with her native background. Her desire to feel comfortable participating in both cultures simultaneously was fueled by her brothers' influence on her sense of identity. They stressed the idea that because they were planning on residing permanently in the United States, they had to learn to function successfully in both cultures. Whenever Tina found herself leaning more towards her native background, she realized that she had to take her brothers' comments to heart.

#### Nature of stay in the United States

Two participants, Sook and Tina, talked about how the nature of their stay in the United States affected their lives. As Tina stated,

If I was born here, I think it would be better. My childhood was spent in another country. If you have dealt with this society, you can settle down here. If not, then you can't. (CM, 2/16)

Tina found it difficult to imagine living in the United States permanently because she was not born or raised here. This difficulty, in some ways, reiterated the reason she felt that she needed to be "Asian American." Because she knew that her family planned on living in the United States, she had to learn to adapt to

the new culture. It was obvious, though, that acculturation into a new society was not necessarily her personal choice.

Similarly, in conversation with Ramesh, a second generation student, Sook said the following:

I understand..if you can't live in India because you live here [United States], then I can't live in the United States because I am not from here. It is the same thing... It is 100 days from now that I will be going back to Korea. Even though I am missing my graduation day, I am excited to go away. (CM, 2/16)

These two participants' lack of time spent in the United States influenced the degree to which they identified with mainstream American culture. Sook was forthright in saying that she did not consider herself to be American at all, but this decision was likely influenced by the fact that her stay in the United States was temporary, and she was fully aware of that. Tina, on the other hand, recognized the need to adopt some elements of mainstream American culture (because her family planned to live here permanently), even though she identified more strongly with Nepali customs, beliefs, and values.

#### Views on interracial and intercultural relationships

The issue of personal relationships was perhaps the most popular topic in the club meetings. During meetings where this topic was discussed, students (typically Sook, Tina, and Wai-Ling) would chat endlessly, and meetings would often exceed the regular one hour meeting time.

Tina told a story that involved her brother and a non-Nepali girl that he met on a vacation. The following excerpt revealed her point of view on interracial and intercultural relationships:

I have one story. My brother was in D.C., and he found this girl. They danced together. She's American. They danced together and took a picture and stuff. My brother came home and she called, and they talked for almost one hour. He says 'She's my friend. I can talk to my friend!'...I had to call my uncle's house and I picked up the phone. I didn't know he was still in the phone. They were still talking! I couldn't say anything. I didn't say anything to my parents. Yesterday, she sent a letter with a picture, and my dad found it. He opened the email first. My dad was so angry and he beat my brother. My mom was crying, moms are moms, you know. My mom is angry though. She cried. They have come to America for us, you know? If we do that, then that's not good (CM, 5/3)

Tina did not approve of her brother's decision to keep in touch with the non-Nepali girl. She believed that by doing so, he was disrespecting his parents.

Earlier in the club meetings, when she spoke in reference to herself, she said,

I never think I am going to marry an American guy, because I don't have that kind of thinking. I still think like my family. If I saw a nice Indian or Nepali boy, I would think 'hmm...he's cute!' (CM, 2/9)

Tina's lack of interest in dating or marrying someone who was not Nepali was evidence of the distinction she drew between "them" (Euro Americans) and "us" (individuals of Asian descent), despite the fact that she expressed a desire to embrace both cultures. Sook, who had been in the United States for the shortest period of time out of the club participants, had a slightly different take on the issue of interracial and intercultural relationships.

If I was to marry an American guy and go back to Korea, everybody would yell at me, including my parents and relatives. They would all be shocked, so if, like, I wasn't going back to Korea, I would not care. I am thinking, though, if I was to marry an American guy, we would have some trouble understanding each other. (CM, 2/9)

Therefore, Sook was not completely opposed to marrying someone who shared her cultural background, though she did acknowledge that given some differences, it could be very challenging. Her tendency during club meetings was

to assume a middle position in relation to Tina and Wai-Ling. Wai-Ling's outlook on personal relationship stood in stark contrast to the other two girls, as it involved scenarios of overt conflict and confrontation with her parents.

My mother knows everything; it is so weird. My dad doesn't know anything. One day she came into my room and said that if you are dating, you better tell me. I wasn't even dating at the time. She just told me that and left my room. A couple weeks later, I was dating, and I told my mom that there is this guy. She asked if he spoke English. I said he was Cantonese. She just said 'no, no'. I asked her why and she went on and on about how he is from China and his family background and all of the differences between him and me. She said it is not possible. She told me to say no to him. One day he called. I was on the phone with him and I heard someone pick up the phone. I was crying at the time, and this made me even more upset. I yelled over the phone 'if you guys want to know anything, just ask me, don't listen to my phone conversations! It is my privacy and stuff'. They didn't say anything. They didn't turn it off or anything. So I ran downstairs and started yelling and stuff and my dad said 'we listened because we care about you'. I said, 'if you want to know anything, just ask me. Don't listen to my phone conversations'. Then he said that I am too young to date. I said something really bad. I told them that, 'cause my parents came here when I was in elementary school, so for ten years I didn't see them. They were never there when I was in elementary school. I told them that when I first started dating, they didn't even know. My mom got really upset and slapped me. I just ran upstairs and slammed the door (CM, 5/3)

As evident in the above excerpt, Wai-Ling faced some conflict in communicating with her parents about personal relationships. They were not supportive of her involvement with the Cantonese boy because he did not share the same cultural background as her. In this and other situations, Wai-Ling often voiced that she wished her parents acted more "American," and allowed her to make personal choices and decisions. Hence, for Wai-Ling, one tension was often between accepting her parents' monocultural ideals and embracing the ways of a new culture.

## Language

First generation participants, in particular, talked about the role that language played in their lives. Sook revealed that she often did not feel comfortable communicating in English: “For me, it is kind of hard to speak English in my classes. I have just lived here for a couple years. I am not shy; I just am uncomfortable” (CM, 2/2).

Wai-Ling felt the same way, which was revealed when she said, “Sometimes you just don’t feel comfortable enough to talk in English. You are afraid to talk” (Int #1). Therefore, because English was their second language, these students often felt like it was difficult to communicate with others in the United States.

For Sook, language also played a role in keeping her connected to her Korean culture. As she stated,

It is important because I can speak certain languages, but that doesn’t mean that I can communicate with people. I think people of the same culture can communicate better. (Int #1)

Hence, for her, the act of speaking in Korean was not only more comfortable, but also, kept her connected with her Asian roots. Girish, a second generation student, in contrast, did not feel that language was an important factor in feeling connected to his Asian roots.

Sapna: In other words, how important do you think language is in making you feel connected to a culture?

Girish: In some ways it doesn’t even matter, because I don’t even practice it. Just because I can speak it [Hindi], it doesn’t make me more Indian. I guess it does keep you in touch though (Int #1)

Girish did acknowledge that language enables one to keep in touch with Asian culture, but because he did not have to speak it frequently, it did not make him “more Indian.” It did not affect his sense of being bicultural.

### Religion

Some participants talked about how they frequently participate in religious activities. As Anita stated,

Well, being Muslim, we pray five times a day and when Ramadan just passed, we did fasting. There are a lot of different parties. Everybody's throwing parties during Ramadan and Eedh. We just went to a Pakistani wedding a week ago. My friend got married. So it's just whenever we, like, get together with Pakistanis. The Pakistani community will throw a party and we'll dress up and go. I like wearing the clothes- they're pretty- but I don't enjoy the Pakistani religion. (Int #1)

Although she participated in religious activities, Anita did not enjoy them very much. Instead, she chose to identify more strongly with the American aspect of her bicultural identity. Similarly, Ramesh had access to religious activities, but did not feel strongly about participating in them.

I think as time goes on, I just get farther away from it [religion and religious classes], but I just try to learn about it. You know, I just want to learn about it. I don't have to actually practice it. (Int #1)

Ramesh found that the knowledge that was gained in religious activities was interesting to him, but at the same time did not find any practical use for it in his daily life. He considered himself to be American, as evident in the following statement:

It is true that my parents named me to be Indian, and that I am under the influence of their ideals, but also at school and outside of home, I am judged as American, and make myself to be an American. (WR, 3/8)

In contrast, Girish, who was also a second generation student, felt more connected to his religion. He expressed his enjoyment in attending a Hindu religion class at the temple every Sunday.

Yeah, just like the class we have. I mean, we can still go along with American things, like in school and everything that goes on; but we still have a connection by going to the temple, going to cultural activities, and going to religious class. Just learning more...  
(Int #1)

Girish found it worthwhile to mesh Indian and American elements into his sense of cultural identity, and appeared to do this somewhat comfortably. Religion played a different role in participants' identity choices and decisions.

#### Perceptions of Home and School

Participants expressed very different perceptions of home and school. Some students, like Anita, talked about how their behavior was different at home and at school.

Well, there's a totally different way of how you act and what you say when you're at home: comments you make, things you talk about, and I wouldn't do that in front of my parents at home as I do over here. (Int #1)

According to Anita, she could express herself more freely in school. At home, she found herself holding back actions and behaviors that she would display openly in school. In contrast, Tina talked about how her experiences in home and school were quite the opposite: "In home, we freely do whatever we want; but in school, they require us to do more stuff, and they are more strict" (Int #1). Unlike Anita, Tina felt more comfortable expressing herself at home. She believed that the pressures inherent in the school setting prevented her from

feeling completely at ease. Sagar, a second generation student, echoed the idea of dealing with academic related pressures, but in a different way:

“At school, you try your best. At home, it's like, you *do* the best” (Int #1). For Sagar and Anita, school was a place where they were able to express themselves more comfortably than at home. Tina, by contrast, felt far more at ease in the home setting. This likely related to the fact that Tina had only lived in the United States for four years, in comparison to Sagar and Anita, who had lived in the United States during the course of their lives.

#### Summary: Factors

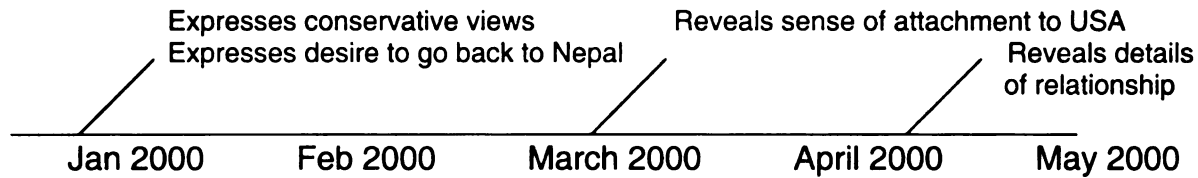
There are a variety of factors that influenced the construction and expression of bicultural identity, including friendship, family, length and nature of stay in the United States, interracial/intercultural relationships, language, religion, and perceptions of home and school.

#### Individual changes and consistencies over the course of the intervention: Tina

The twin themes of change and constancy are central to our understanding of bicultural identity. Through individual change we understand the impact of the intervention, and through individual constancy, we see the interpretive frameworks that the core participants brought to the intervention. Furthermore, we see how issues of individual change are often associated with the periphery of participants' bicultural identities, and issues of individual constancy are often related to the core of participants' bicultural identities.



Figure 9: Changes and Consistencies with Tina<sup>7</sup>



Consistencies:  
-identification with  
grandparent characters  
-distinctions between “us”  
and “them”  
-perception of home and  
school worlds  
-ways of defining her identity

Changes with Tina: Conservative viewpoints lead to revealing details!

Over the course of the intervention, Tina revealed more and more about her personal experiences. Initially, Tina stressed that she had a very conservative outlook on life, one that did not mesh well with what she considered to be mainstream American values. As she said, “I cannot deal with America. I have a big problem here. I am not interested. I am more interested in my background and culture. I am kind of a traditional girl” (CM, 2/16). Because of her traditional perspective, Tina often appeared to have problems relating to conversations we had about dating and interracial/intercultural relationships. Wai-Ling would sometimes talk about her secretive relationship with a Chinese boy at school, venting about her parents’ negative reaction to the situation. In such

conversations, Tina would continually stress how she found it difficult to keep secrets from her family, because they were so close. From these initial conversations, it appeared that Tina disapproved of Wai-Ling's decision to pursue the relationship with the Chinese boy. I attributed her displeasure to the fact that Wai-Ling was pursuing a relationship without parental consent.

Much to my astonishment, in a much later meeting, Tina revealed an important detail of her life.

The girls had a lot to say about this story, and it launched us into a conversation about their personal lives and struggles dealing with members of the opposite sex. I was really glad to see that Wai-ling was very talkative, and appeared eager to share her personal experiences with us. Tina really surprised me too, because she told us about a boyfriend she had. I wasn't expecting to hear this, because she was so traditional and conservative with her outlook on life. It was nice to talk things through...we ended up talking for almost twenty minutes extra after the designated time for the club meeting. They were so eager to keep chatting! (FN, 5/3)

Tina told us details about her secret relationship during that meeting.

...he is from Nepal too. His father and my father are best friends. I've known his father since I was born. We went to the same cultural program in Ohio last year, and fell in love with each other! My parents like them. My parents and his parents know each other closely...I told Mrs. Sawyer too. I never thought these types of things before. When I see him, I feel that way! (CM, 5/3)

I was very surprised to hear that Tina had been involved in a relationship with this young man. She had expressed conservative views about dating and marriage in the past, and her decision to date without her parents' knowledge did not reflect what she had said before. Nonetheless, I was glad that she felt comfortable sharing these personal details with the rest of the group. The Prom

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<sup>7</sup> Missing: Tina's Identity Maps

was approaching shortly after this meeting, and I could tell that Tina was eager to share her excitement about going.

I talked about the Prom. I told my parents that I want to go. My parents do not know that we are in love with each other and stuff. My brother said I should ask him. He could stay at my house and everything...his sister knows about it. He told her. I called him on Saturday and he did say yes! He said I have to go there, to *his* Prom.” (CM, 5/3)

It had taken her some time to feel at ease in the context of the club setting, but it appeared that once she felt relaxed and trusting of others, she could talk openly about her personal life. It also appeared that this change in Tina related to the periphery of her bicultural identity, as she was slowly, but surely, beginning to feel more comfortable in her identification with things that she considered to be “non-Nepali” and less traditional, such as exploring the idea of dating. In the second interview, Tina revealed that in general, the club had helped her feel more comfortable expressing herself out loud in front of others.

Sapna: Do you feel like it [the club] impacted you in anyway?

Tina: You know what I feel now? Before I joined this club, I wouldn't talk that much in class. But now, I'm talking...yeah, I feel that part [reading and talking out loud in the club] is great. You helped me. (Int #2)

Hence, not only had the literature club served as a “safe place” for Tina to talk about deeply personal issues that her parents did not know about, but it also helped her feel more comfortable expressing herself in English, which was her second language.

### Changes with Tina: Becoming attached to the United States

In the beginning, both Tina and Sook overtly expressed that they disliked living in the United States. During this exchange with Ramesh, a second

generation student, they both expressed their desire to be back in their native countries.

Tina: I don't like to live here. I don't want to live here.

Sook: Me too.

Ramesh: This is great though!

Tina: Educationally, it is good here. But the living part, I don't know.

Sook: I miss it [Korea] so much. There is so much I miss. (CM, 2/16)

Tina went on to mention that her reluctance to accept the United States was due, in part, to the fact that she was raised in Nepal.

If I was born here, I think it would be better. My childhood was spent in another country. If you have dealt with this society, you can settle down here. If not, then you can't. (CM, 2/16)

Hence, as evident in the above quote, Tina perceived that there was a relationship between one's length of stay in the United States and level of attachment to the country.

During a later meeting, we read Allen Say's *Grandfather's Journey*. The grandson of a man who was born in Japan tells this children's story. The grandfather) immigrated to the United States as a young man, and spent some time living here. Later, as an adult, he eagerly moved back to Japan, only to find that he missed being in the United States. In essence, he was a man who was torn between two cultures. Tina began to reveal some different feelings towards her experiences living in the United States after reading this children's book. She mentioned how she would miss her after school job if she had to go back to Nepal.

I would miss my job [at Taco Bell]. If I was in Nepal, I would not have had to work. We had a big house and I wouldn't have to work. Here, you have to responsible by yourself. That is why it is so hard there. I think it is more challenging here. (CM, 4/12)

In effect, Tina also began to change her perspective on how attached she was to the United States.

You know what I am thinking right now. If I was living in America for one month or two months, I would not miss it if I went back. Now, I will probably miss some people from here, at least. (CM, 4/12)

Hence, Tina appeared to change her outlook on living in the United States during the later club meetings. Instead of only expressing negative feelings, she also conveyed feelings of connection, nostalgia, and happiness in relation to her experiences away from her native country. It appears that her changing outlook on life in the United States related to the periphery of her bicultural identity, as she was beginning to feel that she was able to function more effectively in mainstream American society.

#### Consistencies with Tina: Identification with Grandparent Characters

Tina also demonstrated some consistencies over the course of the intervention. She consistently related to literary characters who were in grandparent roles. Her steady association with these characters reflected her strong identification with the traditional and conservative aspects of her native Nepali culture (i.e., what she attributed to the core of her bicultural identity). For instance, in reading Wen-Wen C. Wang's *Bacon and Coffee*, Tina agreed with the grandmother's position that her granddaughter was acting "too American".

I think the grandma..she believes in her culture, and I can see her point of view...because we are living in a different culture, and their culture [Americans] is different than ours. (CM, 2/9)

She did not agree with the daughter's more liberal behavior and attitude towards marriage, and instead, found herself identifying with the grandmother, who held long-established attitudes and beliefs. Furthermore, when asked if she

related more to Allen Say's children's book *Tea with Milk*, which is about a young woman's experiences immigrating from the United States to Japan, or his children's book *Grandfather's Journey*, which is about an old man's transitions between Japanese and mainstream American cultures, Tina expressed that her experiences more closely mirrored the experiences of the grandfather.

Sapna: Do you think your experiences are more like the grandfather's experiences, or the girl's experiences?

Tina: I think I am more like the grandfather. I don't know that much about America, you know? When I see the people, I think that they are different. (CM, 4/12)

Tina believed that the young woman in *Tea with Milk*, Masako, was more American in nature, so she could not relate to her very well. Masako did not have a very strong attachment with Japan, because while she growing up, she considered moving back to the United States. It was only after meeting her future husband that she decided that she could be content residing in Japan. The grandfather in the other story, on the other hand, had a strong attachment to his native country, though he expressed that he had deep feelings for both cultures. Tina found herself being the same way.

#### Consistencies with Tina: Distinctions between "Us" and "Them"

As mentioned earlier, throughout the course of interviews and club meetings, Tina also consistently drew distinctions between "us" (individuals of Asian descent) and "them" (Euro American individuals). In the first interview, she talked about her difficulty adjusting to the United States.

Sapna: Is it really difficult for you? Do you feel the need to act differently?

Tina: Very uncomfortable. They are different and I am different. We are all human, but you know, our society is different in Nepal. In America, they have a different society, so I don't mix in too well (Int #1)

Tina articulated that she struggled to feel comfortable in a society that was so different from her native country. Although she had lived in the United States since the end of middle school, she still could not view herself as “one of them.” As she stated, “...we look different because we *are* different, in our color and in our behavior and stuff” (CM, 4/19).

The distinctions that Tina made between “us” and “them” became apparent in our reading of the children’s book *The Bracelet*, by Yoshiko Uchida, which is about the Japanese American relocation experience in the 1940’s. In this story, a young girl named Emi and her family are forced to evacuate their home and move to an internment camp for individuals of Japanese descent. When reading this story, Tina conveyed feelings of anger over how the Japanese were treated:

Sapna: Would you consider them to be American?

Tina: They can, but they are still different than American people...but that’s not right. America is a free country. American people are *not* all born here. They are also from different countries. I know they are white and we are brown, but some Indians are from here.

Sook: They can be either Japanese or American, I think

Tina: That is why I am so mad with American people. They are also from other countries. They fight with colored people. Why do they do that? They [Indians] may be American! They try to have the upper hand. They try to bring other people down. This is just bad of them! (CM, 4/19)

Although she thought that individuals who had resided in the United States all of their lives, such as the Japanese individuals in this story, should be treated equally as Americans, Tina often distinguished between Asians and Americans, and at times, expressed some resentment over how Euro Americans treated people of color. This distinction represented the difference between what she attributed to the core of her bicultural identity (i.e., being Asian) and what she

attributed to the periphery of her bicultural identity (i.e., becoming more comfortable in mainstream American society).

#### Consistencies with Tina: Perceptions of Home and School Worlds

Comparisons between Tina's responses in interview #1 and #2 revealed that Tina's perceptions of her home and school worlds did not change considerably over the course of the intervention. In January, when asked to comment about her perceptions of her home and school worlds, Tina described her experiences the following way: "In home, we freely do whatever we want. But in school, they require us to do stuff" (Int #1).

Later, in the second interview, Tina commented on differences between home and school, in a similar way: "Yeah, I think it is different because at home, we are talking about important stuff, and at school, we cannot. If you have a best friend you can, but not that much" (Int #2). Both of these quotes reflected the difference in how Tina felt at home and at school. At home, she felt that for the most part, she could express herself openly and feel comfortable doing so. At school, where she was a minority (as a first generation Nepali individual), she felt that her interactions were more superficial, and sometimes stressful in nature.

#### Consistencies with Tina: Defining her sense of bicultural identity

In the first interview, when talking about her sense of bicultural identity, Tina stated that she considered herself "Asian American" because "I want to be both" (Int #1). When asked what she considered herself in middle school, she said that she considered herself to be Asian American. When asked what she would consider herself in the future, she laughed and said "both" (Int #1). In the second interview, she said that she still considered herself "Asian American":



Sapna: Why do you consider yourself to be Asian American?

Tina: Because I was born in Asia, you know, so you never can be changed...I wasn't born in America. It's never going to change so...it stays, like our personality and a lot of stuff...

Sapna: How about the American part? How does that come in?

Tina: The American part? Education. In America, we come here to study and stuff. And we learn a lot about American society and other stuff. It is important to learn about other cultures too, you know? (Int #2)

When asked about her middle school experiences with identity, she said that she thought she was more Asian in the past “because you don't know much about America that time because your mind is not growing.” (Int #2). Finally, when asked what she would consider herself in the future, she said the following:

I think both because part [of her identity] is from when I was born. I stayed here [US] when I was thirteen or fourteen years old. In the future, maybe I will stay more here, so maybe I will learn more about here. (Int #2)

Tina's way of defining herself did not really change between the first and second interviews. She still considered herself “Asian American” because she felt she needed to be bicultural in order to understand the ways of mainstream American society. She acknowledged that with time, she may feel more comfortable in the United States, and learn more about the culture.

When asked if there were situations where she felt Asian and situations where she did not feel Asian, Tina conveyed that she often felt uneasy in the presence of Euro American individuals.

When I am with Nepalese people, I am very comfortable with them. I want to be with them, speaking or doing whatever. When I meet with them [Americans], I feel so uncomfortable. Sometimes I do think they are very nice people, but if they are strict, I cannot feel very well. (Int #1)

Tina's response to the same question in the second interview was slightly different, as reflected in this response:

When I meet the Nepali and other Asian people, I feel completely Asian and stuff; but when I meet with other different people, you know, I feel kind of – I'm from America too, and stuff! You know? (Int #2)

As evident in this last response, Tina still believed that there were inherent differences between her and people she considered to be “American.” However, she had begun to realize that because she had lived in the United States for four years, there were points of commonality in her life experiences and the experiences of others who had a different native cultural background. The nature of the relationship between the core of her bicultural identity and what she attributed to the periphery perhaps became slightly less stressful as she became more acclimated to the United States. Her general state of comfort around Euro American individuals, however, did not really change in nature. She still asserted that she was/felt different around “others.”

When asked in the first interview if she found that she needed to balance between participation in two cultures, Tina responded that “It's been difficult to settle, like from one place to another” (Int #1). In the second interview, she elaborated on this idea by talking about how in the past, it was more difficult to balance between two cultures because she was not familiar with English.

Sapna: You didn't know any English?

Tina: No, I learned here...I had a lot of difficulty learning. But I forced myself to do that. That's why I learned the language, you know? Maybe that's why, you know, if you know both then it's easy for you to...

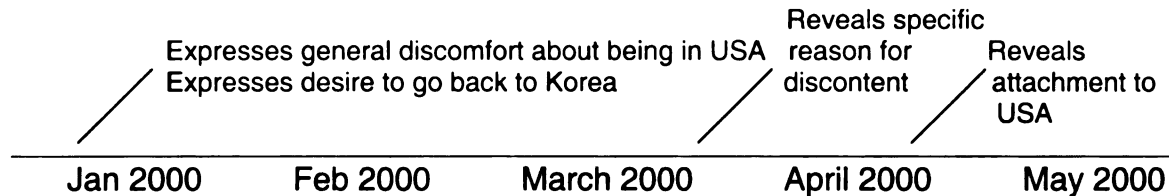
Sapna: ...adjust?

Tina: uh hum (Int #2)

In both interviews, Tina talked about the difficulties she had in balancing between participation in two cultures, pointing to the language barrier as a major factor in her tough adjustment.

## Individual changes and consistencies over the course of the intervention: Sook

Figure 10: Changes and Consistencies with Sook



Consistencies:  
-expressing discomfort in speaking English  
-perception of home and school worlds  
-ways of defining her identity  
-balancing between two cultures

### Changes with Sook: Expression of general discontentment leads to specific reasons

Sook also revealed a lot about herself and her experiences during the course of the intervention. Although she was deeply analytical in her reading and interpretation of literature and often made personal connections to what we read, she did not enjoy expressing herself in English around Euro American individuals, particularly at school. She said, "For me, it is kind of hard to speak English in my classes. I have just lived here for a couple years. I am not shy; I just am uncomfortable" (CM, 2/2). In earlier meetings, although Sook pointed to

language as a complex issue in her adjustment to a new culture, she did not disclose any specific events or turning points that prompted her to become bitter in her transition to the United States, something that had appeared evident in earlier meetings. In a later meeting, however, she disclosed a specific reason for her disillusionment.

Sook: I have so many regrets about my life here. I could've worked harder, and done my best more. I have had mixed feelings. I have less than 50 days till I go back.

Sapna: What kinds of regrets do you have?

Sook: Everything. I could've challenged myself more. I could've gone to the camp one more time. I went to this camp for three weeks when I first got here. I had such a hard time because when I first got here, it was so hard to understand things and do everything. I had my 17<sup>th</sup> birthday there, and I didn't know anyone. I was kind of mad at my parents, because they had sent me to this camp. I was so mad, so angry. I didn't know why I was there, and I had to think a lot about it. I think that was the hardest time that I have had so far in my life...

Sapna: You felt like you were forced to adjust too quickly...

Sook: ..after that, I was being a bad girl towards my parents. I always yelled at them and had arguments with them. Now, I don't think I should act like this, because my mom and dad are separate from one another [her father is in Korea and mother is in the United States, but they are still married]. I am still sad about the camp. Whenever I think about the camp, I always cry.

Sapna: That is a really hard first experience to have, you know? Did they send you there because they thought it would make it easier for you to adjust here?

Sook: Yes, and I love to go camping. Half of the opinion to go there was mine. When I got there, I blamed it on my parents. I didn't eat anything there. I would drink one coke a day...they [people at the camp] were really nice to me and tried to make me feel comfortable. They had a birthday party for me. I don't why I had those kinds of feelings; it was just so hard for me to be there. (CM, 4/21)

In this later meeting Sook expressed a concrete reason for why she had become cynical and disillusioned in her experiences: her experiences in summer camp. Sook attended this summer camp less than a month after immigrating to the United States with her family. Although she admitted that she had some say in the decision for her to attend the camp, she felt that her parents exercised

poor judgment in sending her there so soon after immigrating to the United States, which ultimately led to an awkward and unpleasant personal experience.

Furthermore, Sook was able to relate this personal experience to a poem that we read in the club. Sanjeev Kaila's *Stained Glass Window* is a poem about an individual who feels that his identity is comprised of many different parts, analogous to the many different colors in a stained glass window. In thinking about her camp experience, Sook drew connections to this poem.

In the "Stained Glass Window", I think he was talking about stereotypes which other cultures have. In here [US], some people do not see people as the same as themselves. One time, I went to camp. They were playing a game which I have played since I was little; but one girl, who was in my cabin, said "you probably don't know how to play this game because you are not American". I was really hurt. Of course, there were some differences, but we were human and my teachers knew how to teach the game. I think that girl really did not see me as the same as her. She probably had some kind of prejudice. Sometimes those kinds of happenings hurt me a lot. (WR, 3/8)

Our conversation, as well as this particular writing assignment, helped me understand the circumstances that led Sook to express the types of feelings and thoughts that she often did during club meetings: such as mixed emotions about her experiences in the United States, and expressions of anger and sadness during conversations about immigration. As I wrote in my field notes after that meeting,

Sook was in a very talkative mood. She started telling a story about one of her first experiences here: at a summer camp that her parents sent her to. I could tell that that experience really made her emotional, because she looked like she was going to cry at times. I didn't want to interrupt the flow of her talking, so I kept quiet for the most part. I felt like I learned a lot about Sook that day. (FN, 4/21)

I was glad that Sook eventually felt comfortable enough to talk about her painful personal experiences with the group. She had certainly not been secretive about the stressful nature of her transition to the United States, but had

not revealed why her feelings were, in some sense, beyond feelings of discomfort in a new place. In earlier club meetings, I had known two things: that she had agreed with her parents' decision to be in the United States for a short period of time, and that she had a close and open relationship with her mother. I had been puzzled about why she often seemed so bitter and resentful. After the club meeting in which she revealed this incident, I feel that a lot of pieces fell into place for me. All in all, I was glad that she felt comfortable talking about this painful experience.

#### Changes with Sook: Becoming Attached to the United States

Sook recognized that she was receiving a good education in the United States, but was not pleased with her quality of life here. Reasons such as cultural clash, limited English language proficiency, and nostalgia affected her attitude towards living in the United States. In a conversation with Ramesh, Sook talked about her reasons for not being able to settle in the United States.

I understand..if you can't live in India because you live here [United States], then I can't live in the United States because I am not from here. It is the same thing... It is 100 days from now that I will be going back to Korea. Even though I am missing my graduation day, I am excited to go away. (CM, 2/16)

This excerpt revealed her feelings of being a visitor in the United States. After reading the children's book *Grandfather's Journey*, however, she revealed a sense of attachment to the United States which she had not expressed before.

Sook: When I read this one [Grandfather's Journey], I could kind of see my feelings. Like when I am here, I miss things in Korea. When I go back to Korea, I will probably miss things here.

Sapna: What kinds of things will you miss from here?

Sook: School probably..even though I don't really like it. Even though I don't think I will have these types of memories, I will probably miss every little thing about here. (CM, 4/12)

Furthermore, in the second interview, Sook disclosed that she was more comfortable with her adjustment to the United States, and identity issues and struggles associated with the transition.

Sook: I am just going to be a very positive person. I was sad when I first got here, with all of my troubles. I really hated being here and just wanted to leave here, but after a bit, I changed my mind. I think I am supposed to be happy and give it a chance.

Sapna: Are you glad that you stayed now?

Sook: Yeah. I am really glad that I had this experience. (Int #2)

Hence, like Tina, instead of only expressing negative feelings towards the United States, in time, Sook also conveyed feelings of connection, nostalgia, and happiness in relation to her experiences away from her native country. This could be due in part to her reading of the book *Grandfather's Journey*, which offered her a different perspective on the immigration experience. Whatever the reason was, it appeared that the relationship between what she attributed to the core of her bicultural identity (i.e., being Korean) and what she attributed to the periphery of her bicultural identity (i.e., factors associated with the transition and adjustment to the United States) became less stressful as she began to uncover a sense of attachment to the United States.

#### Consistencies with Sook: Expressing discomfort in speaking English

Sook also demonstrated some consistencies over the course of the intervention. She frequently communicated that she felt uncomfortable speaking English in the United States. In earlier club meetings, Sook expressed some resentment over her language experiences in the United States, as revealed in this dialogue:

Sook: If I lived here for twenty years, then I would probably become like her [main character, Su Lin's] dad. I would become a very mean person. I don't really like living in America. I have changed a lot since I moved here. There are some positive sides, but a lot of negative sides for me. Personality changes that I do not like. I become angry, so I have to move back [to Korea].

Sapna: You think it has made you a bitter person, kind of like this guy?

Sook: Yeah

Ramesh: What makes you bitter?

Sook: Like her father, language...like you are talking for five minutes, and someone says 'um, I don't understand you' If they say this, I feel so bad...I never speak English at home, or with my friends (CM, 2/16)

In this excerpt, Sook compared herself to Su-Lin's father in Ching-Fei Chang's *Homecoming*. She expressed some regret over the way she had changed since she moved to the United States. She also revealed a sense of discomfort in having to communicate in English, which was her second language.

This factor remained an uncomfortable issue for Sook throughout the course of the intervention.

#### Consistencies with Sook: Perceptions of Home and School Worlds

Comparisons between Sook's responses in interviews #1 and #2 illustrated that her perceptions of her home and school worlds did not change considerably over the course of the intervention. In January, when asked to comment about her perceptions of her home and school worlds, Sook offered the following response:

Sapna: Some people talk about home and school as being two different cultural worlds. What do you think they mean when they talk about home and school being two different cultural worlds? Do you understand the question?

Sook: Yeah. Two different cultures. Well, this is right. I agree with them because I always feel that. (Int #1)



In May, she had a similar response to this question: "Food is different. Everything is different" (Int #2). Sook pointed to differences in her home and school worlds in both situations.

#### Consistencies with Sook: Defining her sense of bicultural identity

In terms of her sense of identity, in both interviews, Sook said that she considered herself to be "forever Korean." When asked why, she answered "because I cannot be American, maybe. It's kind of hard and I figured out the best way to be in America is to be myself..." (Int #2).

In reference to middle school, Sook said that she felt the same way. Furthermore, looking into the future, Sook said (in both interviews) that she would still consider herself to be "Asian."

Sapna: Just say that you had stayed here and not gone back to Korea, do you think your view would have changed on things? You think you would have stayed the same?

Sook: I think I really need to be comfortable with my culture, and I don't think I need to hide those things. If I am to be here, I just want to be myself, and if people are really interested and know that they are different, they are going to understand that I am being myself. (Int #2)

Thus in terms of her sense of identity, Sook defined herself similarly in both interviews.

Sook also revealed similarities in her pre and post identity maps. In January, Sook mentioned the following four influences on her sense of identity: parents, friends, books, and American culture. When asked to discuss two of these influences, she talked about how American culture made her think of who she was, and why she was in the United States. She also talked about how the struggles and experiences of characters in books helped her learn how to deal with and solve her own problems. Sook listed the same four influences in relation to her identity in May. Hence, although she acknowledged various influences on

her sense of identity, she continued to attribute being Korean to the core of her bicultural identity.

Furthermore, when asked if there were situations where she felt Asian and situations where she did not feel Asian, Sook expressed that she always felt the same, regardless of what context she was participating in: "I am always Asian and I cannot change my thoughts...I always think I am Korean and I'll be Korean forever..." (Int #1). In the second interview, Sook expressed similar sentiments.

Sapna: Do you ever have situations where you feel Asian, and other situations where you don't feel Asian?

Sook: No (Int #2)

As evident in these two interviews, Sook did not consider herself to be American. She acknowledged that mainstream American culture had influenced her sense of identity, but did not attribute it to the core of her identity. Rather, she viewed herself as a foreigner who was temporarily residing in the United States.

#### Consistencies with Sook: Balancing between participation in two cultures

During January, when asked whether Asian teenagers could grow up in the United States without forsaking their sense of Asian identity, Sook talked about how it was difficult for parents to encourage their children to retain a sense of Asian identity amidst participation in two different cultures.

Well, the parents need to be more strict to teach them that they are not fully American and they have to deal with two cultures; but then, it would be really, really hard for them because most of their life time would be in America... (Int #1)

Sook also pointed to the complex process of negotiating between two cultures in the second interview.

Sapna: Do you think Asian teenagers can be involved in America, but still keep that sense of their culture and tradition?

Sook: I really don't know...I think that's probably really hard to do...they don't really know who they are, am I American or am I Asian? And they have to give in to become more American, more than their culture, and they have to

learn two languages. And they have to adjust to two cultures rather than one culture. That is really hard, to deal with being between Asian and American. (Int #2)

As evident in these two interviews, Sook appeared skeptical about the possibility of Asian teenagers retaining a sense of Asian ethnic identity while living in the United States. She believed that the often problematic tension between Asian and mainstream American cultures could lead one to choose one culture over the other, rather than learn to balance between participation in both of them. Parents played an important role in how teenagers made their identity choices in her opinion.

When asked in the first interview if she found that she needed to balance between participation in two cultures, Sook responded,

Well, yes, especially, like, not only culture, for school. I have to deal with that...Korea has a really, really different education system, so I have to deal with how I'm going to survive! How I'm going to succeed in my classes. I have to learn those things by myself. Other students, they're in school [here] through Kindergarten through high school, but I just jumped in... (Int #1)

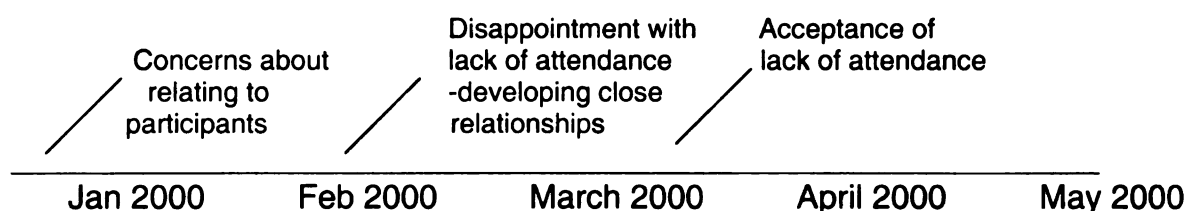
Sook talked about how home and school represented two different cultures in her life. In the second interview, Sook echoed similar sentiments by talking about some true stories that she had heard about Asian individuals killing themselves and loved ones as a result of complex bicultural identity struggles. As a result of hearing about such cases and others, Sook talked about how she wanted to help people in such situations in the future.

I really liked being here and it was fun to know the other people's ideas, how they think about Asia. I will think about those things and I am probably going to study about this even more so I can help other people with what's troubling them, because they are Asian and are in America. One of my future dreams is to be a counselor. (Int #2)

From her personal experiences in the United States and stories she had heard about others' experiences, Sook acknowledged that it was often difficult to balance between participation in two cultures, and hoped that she could help people better deal with the adjustment in the future.

#### Individual changes over the course of the intervention: Sapna

Figure 11: Changes with Sapna



#### Initial disappointment and confusion leading to eventual acceptance

The idea of setting up a supportive literacy environment for Asian high school students to explore and sort through their identity-related issues was my main academic priority, as it was a major aspect of my dissertation. Because it was an important priority for me, I focused a lot of my energy and effort on the creation and sustainability of the club. It was difficult for me to understand, at first, why so many students who had expressed initial interest never chose to participate in the club. During the first month of meetings, I was consistently disappointed with the poor attendance. Some students I interviewed never attended any meetings, and others would simply not show up, without any explanation for their absence. I realized over the course of time, however, that I should not take this lack of attendance personally. High school students have

multiple academic priorities, and a new, temporary club would likely not be a top priority for them (especially if they had been committed to other after school activities from before). I, on the other hand, considered the club to my main academic priority, and the students obviously could not understand that, nor should I expect them to understand.

Needless to say, I was really flustered and kind of upset about all of this. I realized, however, at that point that I should not take this all personally. It really is the fact that these students already have prior commitments, and I can't take those away from them. I wonder if other students (who are non-Asian) have as many commitments as these kids do. That may be something worth finding out. (PJ, 3/8)

Further, the tension between being in a teacher role vs. being in a facilitator position (in the earlier meetings) amplified some of the negative feelings I was experiencing in the beginning of the club. I often felt like I was lecturing the students about the readings, and at times felt like I was asking too many questions of them. I did not want them to feel like I was the teacher leading English class. I wanted our conversations to be more casual in nature. I wanted them to feel at ease with the discussion and written assignments and not feel like they were being formally assessed. I encountered one noteworthy situation where I felt torn between these two different roles. During this particular club meeting, none of the students had done the reading. Because they were not prepared to discuss the reading, I told them a topic and asked them to write a short, informal reflection in relation to this topic. One of the students, Sook, seemed very reluctant to write.

I feel like I faced a minor dilemma at that time. Should I step forward with the authority of a teacher and tell her that because everyone else was writing, she should be too? Or, do I sit back as this student facilitator of the

group, this individual who is striving to be accepted as an equal (in some sense), and express empathy and let her do whatever she wants? Well, judging by the look on her face (which was a combination of boredom, fatigue, and attitude), I decided to let her do what made her most comfortable (though inside, I was bothered by it all). (PJ, 3/15)

Ultimately, I decided that I definitely did not want to create the atmosphere of a typical academic class. I wanted them to feel comfortable in the club, knowing that they had choices and input in what activities took place. I decided that it was better for me to stick with the role of the facilitator, rather than letting my “teaching tendencies” take over!

Concerns about being able to relate to participants eventually leading to friendships built on mutual trust

One positive aspect of being the facilitator was being able to relate well to the students, because we shared Asian backgrounds and were not very far apart in age. From getting yelled at by the school librarian since a student and I were unable to produce hall passes to legitimately demonstrate that we were not skipping class (!), to sharing a vast array of personal issues one may face while growing up Asian in America, I felt like we were able to relate on many levels. Some of my students had older siblings who were close in age to me, so I feel that in some ways they were able to relate to me the way they may to their siblings. In conversations with me, some first generation students frequently made cultural distinctions between “us” (meaning, individuals of Asian descent), and “them” (Euro American individuals), leading me to believe that they accepted me as “one of them.”

Because we were able to relate on a personal level, I feel that I was able to build strong, trusting relationships with a few of the students. One student, Wai-Ling, was usually very shy and quiet. One may have been quick to assume that she had nothing pressing or important to say, but in fact, she had experienced quite a bit in her eighteen years. Three years after she was born in Taiwan, her mother left her with her grandparents, in order to join Wai-Ling's father, who was already settled in the United States (because of his occupation). Until she was in the eighth grade, she and her younger brother lived with her grandparents. At age 13, her mother came back to Taiwan, this time, to take her children back to the United States with her. At the age of 14, she made two major transitions in her life: living with her parents again, and making the move to a foreign country. I recall that she revealed a lot about her past in our initial interview and was glad that she felt comfortable sharing her experiences with me. From early on, I found that students were talking and exploring issues of importance to them, which helped establish a sense of security and comfort in our interactions with one another.

My objective of creating a supportive environment where students could talk openly about their identity experiences became a reality over the course of our time together. The three first generation girls who attended the majority of the meetings shared many of their triumphs, obstacles, and puzzlement about being Asian teenagers in the United States. One topic that came up repeatedly was that of relationships with the opposite sex. Both Wai-Ling and Tina were dating young men behind their parents' backs. They were not happy about having to

withhold information from their parents, but felt that their parents would not be accepting of their choices for various reasons. Wai-Ling, who is Taiwanese, was dating a Chinese boy who came from a background very different than hers. Tina, who is Nepali, was dating her father's best friend's son. Though she knew her parents would eventually permit her to have such a relationship, she was afraid to tell them about her current relationship because they wanted her to only focus on education at this point of her life. Another recurring topic was the transition between Asia to the United States. Two of the girls, Sook and Tina, shared emotional details about their move away from home. On one particular day, I remember feeling really good about these conversations.

I was very happy that day, because I really feel like I connect to these two girls. There is this sense of trust, and this sense of identification that I feel they have with me, which is nice to have. I wasn't sure that first generation kids would be able to relate to me this way. (PJ, 3/29)

Initially, I had been concerned because I was not sure if the first generation students would be able to relate to me well, because my experiences as an individual who was born and raised in the United States were, in some ways, so different from their experiences. I found, however, that our different experiences did not prevent us from relating to one another. In fact, we would often make comparisons to one another's experiences, and would learn a lot from one another. Over the course of eighteen weeks, I became very close with the two core participants: Sook and Tina.

#### Summary: Individual Changes and Consistencies

In summary, the core participants, Tina and Sook, exhibited some changes over the course of the intervention. These changes often related to the



periphery of their bicultural identities. Tina, who was initially very quiet about her personal life, revealed that she had a boyfriend and was not opposed to dating during the teenage years without parental knowledge! Over the course of the intervention, Sook revealed a specific reason for why her transition to the United States was particularly difficult and stressful. Both Tina and Sook, however, revealed a deeper sense of attachment to the United States during the course of the intervention.

During the course of the intervention, I underwent some personal changes as well. At first, I took the lack of attendance personally, but later, began to understand that just because the after school club was my main academic priority, I could not expect it to be the same way for the participants. For them, this club was an extracurricular activity nested within a series of academic and non-academic priorities that may have been in existence prior to the creation of this club. At first, I had some personal concerns about whether or not I would be able to relate effectively to my participants. Over the course of the intervention, I was able to overcome these concerns, and found that there were many positive aspects to being a facilitator in the club, including being able to relate to students on a personal level and building strong, trusting relationships with them.

Tina and Sook also expressed views, thoughts, and feelings that remained constant over the course of the intervention. These unvarying factors, which were found in club meeting conversations, interviews, and the identity map, were often associated with the core of their bicultural identities, and were related to particular identifications they made in the club, their perceptions of their

home and school worlds (including people who were a part of these worlds), their senses of bicultural identity, and their notions of balancing between participation in two cultures.

## Discussion

### Reducing tensions within one's sense of bicultural identity

One theme that became apparent with students was the idea of reducing tensions within one's sense of bicultural identity. The participants of this study tried to reduce tensions in relation to their identities in various ways. Some, like Wai-Ling, tried to balance between participation in two cultures. This feat was often difficult to accomplish.

When I talk to my friends on the phone, friends in Taiwan, I always get stuck with my Chinese Mandarin. It's like, I don't know how to express myself in Mandarin. It's kind of weird, it's like, 'Oh, and so now you are American!' And here, you look so different from everybody else, like skin color and hair color. Sometimes I just get confused with that. Am I Chinese or American? (Int #1)

Ramesh, on the other hand, appeared to negotiate identity-related tensions through identifying more strongly with one culture. As he stated, "I don't really try to balance. I think I'm pretty much American, you know?" (Int # 1) Ramesh did not feel that he needed to achieve a balance between two cultures because he did not have a strong desire to learn about his parents' native culture. Girish, who was also a second generation student, felt differently about his participation in two cultures. He appeared to reduce identity-related tensions by incorporating aspects of both cultures into his sense of identity. He referred to himself as,

...Asian American, because I have an Asian background, but I've been raised basically in America. I mean, I know a lot of our culture and things like that, but I haven't really experienced it fully, so I guess I can say that. (Int #1)

For Girish, adopting elements from both cultures was not a conscious process. He simply felt that both cultures were a vital part of who he was. Clearly, reducing tensions within one's sense of bicultural identity did not always involve the goal of being equally competent in both cultures. In some cases, students lessened identity-related tensions by putting one of the two cultures aside, or trying to incorporate aspects of both cultures in their sense of identity: sometimes not being conscious of "code switching" between settings.

The findings of this study illustrate that the participants had different notions of what it meant to be bicultural. Participants demonstrated that although the inherent cultural attitudes, beliefs, values, and codes of living may be similar for a particular group of individuals who share similar backgrounds and heritages (such as the three Indian students in my study), variations in their experiences and ways of negotiating the core and periphery aspects of their identities resulted in multiple processes of bicultural identity development as expressed in different ways of lessening tensions. I had originally hypothesized that the process of arriving at a tension-lessened sense of bicultural identity would take place when an person had a sense of coherence in the process of identity formation, and also felt that he/she could comfortably "code switch" depending on the particular context he/she was participating in. For instance, based on the results of the Vyas (1998) study, I theorized that an individual who defined him/herself as "Indian American," but was comfortably able to portray the Indian or American

aspects of his/her identity depending on the particular context, would be able to reduce tensions related to one's sense of bicultural identity. What I found in my dissertation study was very different than what I had anticipated. The majority of participants did not arrive at or progress towards a tension-lessened sense of bicultural identity in the way that I had originally envisioned it. I found that the nature of the relationship between the core and periphery of one's bicultural identity contributed to the degree of identity-related tension that participants experienced.

This study, unlike the Vyas (1998) study, included first generation students who were recent immigrants to the United States. These first generation students were the core participants in club meetings. Because they had only been in the country for 2.5-4 years, at least two of out of three (Sook and Tina) identified much more strongly with their native cultures. Sook experienced her sense of Korean identity in all contexts, and considered herself a guest in a foreign country, especially since she was returning to Korea at the end of her senior year. According to her, she experienced minimal tension between the core (i.e., being Korean) and periphery (i.e., her way of life in the United States) of her identity, because she knew that she was "forever Korean", and would be back home someday. Tina consistently drew distinctions between "them" (Euro Americans) and "us" (individuals of Asian descent), hence attributing being Nepali to her core sense of identity. Though she did express a need to learn more about American culture, it was apparent through club meeting conversations and interviews that she was only open to learning about

mainstream American culture because she knew that her family planned to stay in the United States permanently. Although she attributed being Nepali to her core identity, she expressed the desire to be able to function effectively in mainstream society, which constituted the periphery of her identity.

Wai-Ling, however, appeared different than the other two first generation girls. It became apparent through club meeting conversations and interview #1 that she was often conflicted over her sense of identity. Though she found solace and comfort in classmates who shared the same background, she was intrigued by the individualistic nature of mainstream American society. Sometimes, she expressed being jealous of others who did not have to face the same types of issues that she had to face with her strict and traditional Asian parents. However, it appeared that in order for her to experience a sense of tension-lessened identity, she needed to feel completely at ease in both cultures, which was a difficult feat to accomplish. Her identity struggles largely involved having to reconcile how her parents perceived and treated her, versus how she wanted to be perceived and treated (which was in a more “Americanized” way). Although in interview #1 she revealed that she considered herself “Asian,” she was nonetheless eager to adopt elements of mainstream American culture into her sense of self. It was therefore evident that the relationship between the core of her identity (i.e., being Asian) and the periphery of her identity (i.e., wanting to fit in to mainstream American society, wanting to embrace some more “western ways” of being) caused her a lot of identity-related tension.

Secondly, as apparent in earlier sections of this chapter, the second generation students (Ramesh, Girish, Anita, and Sagar) identified themselves quite differently. Although Ramesh and Anita mainly considered themselves to be “American,” they did identify specific scenarios in which they “felt Asian.” In other words, they attributed being American to their core senses of identity, but also acknowledged that the periphery of their identity involved participation in cultural activities, rituals, and situations where they simply felt more Asian. Girish and Sagar, who were also second generation participants, appeared to have different experiences with identity. They consistently defined themselves as “Asian American”, and were not conscious of portraying their identities differently in various contexts. Hence, the core and periphery of their identities were very similar, as it appeared that they did not make distinctions between the two.

In summary, it appears that the participants of this study made sense of their participation in two cultures in a variety of different ways, influencing the construction and expression of their bicultural identities, and the relationship between the core and periphery of their identities. It is important to recognize, however, that this study focused on a particular period in time: the time that they were participating in this study, which for some students ranged from one interview to 2 weeks, and for others, such as the core participants, ranged over roughly four months. An intervention study that took place over a longer period of time with more consistently involved participants may yield different and more detailed findings. In such a scenario, perhaps we would be more likely to see

pronounced changes or developments in participants' sense of bicultural identity, based on participation in the club.

#### Role of Individual Changes and Consistencies: Core Participants

As detailed earlier, the core participants, Tina and Sook, demonstrated few individual changes over the course of the intervention. By contrast, they demonstrated many consistencies throughout the course of the intervention.

##### Expression of deeper attachment to the United States

One individual change that did occur was that they expressed increased feelings of attachment to the United States. For Sook, in particular, these more recent feelings of attachment stood in stark contrast to the bitter feelings that she voiced earlier in the intervention. It is likely that these newer feelings resulted from the fact that she was leaving for Korea one week after the last club meeting. Realizing that her time in the United States was slowly coming to an end, Sook was beginning to reflect on her overall experience away from home and was recognizing that there were aspects of her life in the United States that she would miss, such as her new friends and teachers.

Furthermore, for both Sook and Tina, reading the book *Grandfather's Journey* represented a turning point because it demonstrated how one can be deeply attached to one's native culture (in the grandfather's case, being attached to Japanese culture), and simultaneously experience some sense of attachment to another culture (i.e., missing that culture when one is away from it). As Sook said, "Here he says, 'In one culture, I am homesick for the other'. I think that may happen to me" (CM, 4/12). Feeling this sense of dual attachment does not

necessarily involve having to choose between one culture or the other; one can selectively embrace certain elements of both cultures, which at first may have appeared like an unlikely task for these first generation students who were undoubtedly more attached to their native culture. Sook and Tina often experienced the tension between not wanting to mask their core selves versus finding it painful to stick out in a crowd because they looked different, or because they experienced difficulty communicating in English. After reading this children's book, however, it appeared that both Sook and Tina expressed more comfort with their sense of being bicultural.

#### Possible explanations for few intraindividual changes

One possible explanation for the few intraindividual changes was that the intervention was not long enough for me to witness any major changes in the core participants. This after school club met over the course of roughly four months, and thus, provided me with a "developmental snapshot" of these participants' lives. A club that met over a longer period of time would possibly yield different results.

During the course of the intervention, Tina repeatedly emphasized that she perceived a relationship between one's length of stay in the United States and one's level of attachment and identification with mainstream American culture. Thus, it is likely that if the core participants had lived in the United States for a longer period of time, the feeling of "being American" would have been more central to the way that they defined themselves. During these formative, identity making years of adolescence, Sook and Tina perhaps would have been able to



better “balance” between participation in both cultures if they had lived here longer. In the second interview, Tina equated being able to balance between two cultures with being able to understand and communicate effectively in two different languages. Perhaps this “balancing act” would have become more comfortable over the course of time. Tina’s comment about the club’s positive impact on her English language communication definitely represented a step in this direction.

Finally, Sook and Tina were both recent immigrants to the United States. From the beginning, Sook knew that she would eventually return to Korea. It is likely that both participants were more resistant to changing their views, thoughts, and feelings, as they voiced that for them, being bicultural involved being able to effectively function in mainstream American society. It is likely that despite their desire to be able to live comfortably in the United States, they were still very attached to their native cultures, and were reluctant to part with their core sense of being Asian.

#### Implications for an alternative theoretical model of bicultural identity

Given these research findings, what are the implications for an alternative theoretical model of bicultural identity? The theoretical conceptualization of bicultural identity that I developed in my practicum was based on a sample of second-generation Indian participants. Based on the diversity of my dissertation sample, an alternative theoretical model of bicultural identity would have to represent a wider array of bicultural identity experiences (i.e., with participants of various Asian cultures, including Indian, Pakistani, Nepalese, Korean, and

Taiwanese cultures, and of different generational statuses). Furthermore, this study points to the important role of attribution, and how the nature of the relationship between what one attributes to the core and periphery of one's bicultural identity may contribute to the degree of identity-related tensions that one experiences. Due to these two important factors, the theoretical conceptualization that I proposed in my practicum had to be revised and extended in order to accurately represent the nature of my dissertation participants' diverse bicultural identity experiences.

## CHAPTER 6: CHANGING RELATIONS BETWEEN INDIVIDUALS AND THE ACTIVITY

### Chapter Overview

Current research on book clubs (See McMahon & Raphael, 1997) points to a) the creation and implementation of particular types of book clubs and b) the individual experiences of students within these clubs. This chapter illustrates the *developing relationship* between an activity (i.e., the literature club) and the experiences of the students who participated in the club.

The main purpose of studying this developing relationship between the literacy activity and the participants is to highlight the *consequential* nature of their identity making processes between the social institutions of home and school. As Beach (1999) states,

A change in relation can occur through a change in the individual, the activity, or both. Transitions are consequential when they are consciously reflected on, often struggled with, and the eventual outcome changes one's sense of self and social positioning. (p. 114)

In order to fully understand the nature of changes and consistencies that occur throughout the course of the intervention, this study requires an analysis of the changing relationship between the creation and development of the club and the individuals who participated within the club; however, the idea of examining the “changing individual” in relation to the activity is simplistic, unless we attempt to understand the more specific identity-related negotiations that the individual undergoes in this changing relationship (i.e., an acknowledgement of how the core and periphery of bicultural identity come into play, and how the relationship between the two may lead to various processes by which participants within the

club negotiate potential identity-related tensions in forming a sense of bicultural identity).

In this chapter, I characterize the changing relations between individuals and the activity in three major ways: change in individual-change in activity, change in activity-individual constant, and change in individual-activity constant.

#### Change in Individual-Change in Activity

One way to view the changing relations between the participants and the literacy activity is through the lens of change occurring in both the individuals and the activity. As detailed in Chapter 4, the atmosphere of the club changed dramatically over the course of the intervention. At first, there was an aura of formality, as participants often hesitantly raised their hands before expressing their views to the rest of the group and did not speak very explicitly about their personal experiences. Over the course of time, the ambience became increasingly casual and less structured, and students would sit in whichever way they felt most comfortable (whether it be in a desk or on the floor). They expressed their views, opinions, and personal experiences more freely to the group. Over the course of time, the composition of club participants also changed, from being a mixture of first and second generation immigrant students to a more homogeneous group of first generation students.

While the club became increasingly informal and more homogeneous in terms of participants' generational statuses, the core participants, Sook and Tina, revealed more and more detail about their lives. They appeared to express more security and trust in publicly reflecting upon and identifying with various bicultural

issues. They appeared to experience less tension in the relationship between the core and periphery of their bicultural identities over the course of the intervention as a result. Sook, who had been talkative and outgoing from the beginning of the club, eventually revealed a concrete reason (i.e., summer camp) for why her transition to the United States had been so stressful for her, and why it had led her to be resentful of Euro American people. Tina, who had been a little more reserved about divulging details of her life, astonished members of the group when she later revealed that she had been involved in a secret romantic relationship with a family friend.

I underwent some important personal changes as well with this increased level of comfort and sharing. At first, I had been concerned about being able to relate effectively to the first generation participants, because I felt that their bicultural struggles were going to be so different than my own. I was afraid that in making the distinction between “us” and “them,” participants like Tina would not feel completely comfortable discussing personal issues related to identity with a member of the second generation, and would perceive me as being one of “them.” In the beginning, I was also concerned with the lack of attendance, because I had been under the impression that several students were planning on joining the club.

Over the course of the intervention I was able to overcome these personal challenges. As the club changed to become more comfortable and informal, I realized that my first generation participants viewed me as a friend and a confidante, and became less concerned with them thinking that I was “on the

other side.” I also became less concerned with the poor attendance, because I was able to refocus my attention to the intriguing lives and experiences of two core participants who came to virtually every club meeting. The quality of our interactions together contributed to the depth of our relationships with one another, and now, six months later, I am happy to say that we still keep in regular contact with one another via email.

#### Change in Activity-Individual Constant

Another way to view the changing relations between the participants and the literacy activity is through the lens of a changing activity and unchanging individuals. As the atmosphere of the club became less formal and the makeup of the group shifted from students who reflected a diverse array of experiences (based on such factors as language, gender, and culture) to students who shared many similar cultural and linguistic issues in their transitions to the United States, Sook continued to express discomfort about having to speak English. She was often resentful that when she made an effort to communicate with people in the United States, they would look at her blankly and say that they did not comprehend what she was saying. She continually stressed how it was much easier to communicate and interact with those who shared her cultural and linguistic background. As a result, although the activity changed in nature, she consistently attributed being Korean to the core of her bicultural identity. This was largely due to the fact that she had only spent half of her high school years in the United States, and would be returning to Korea at the end of the academic year.

Hence, this was one individual factor that remained constant, despite the shifting nature of the activity.

#### Change in Individual-Activity Constant

A third way to view the changing relations between the participants and the literacy activity is through the lens of individual change and constant activity. Throughout the course of the intervention, the main purpose behind the club was to establish a caring literacy environment within which students could communicate and interact on identity issues that were relevant in their lives. I wanted to provide students with the opportunity to voice issues and concerns related to their experiences growing up bicultural in the United States. The club not only supported the expression of one's native Asian culture, but also encouraged students to articulate connections or tensions that they felt in relation to mainstream American society.

Although this initial purpose, of providing students with a "safe place" to explore and discuss identity-related issues and concerns remained constant over the course of time, the core participants at first did not express a deep sense of attachment to the United States. In fact, in the heat of emotion, they sometimes revealed a sense of resentment and animosity towards mainstream American society. Over the course of time, however, they began to reveal fond feelings and memories of being in the United States, and in effect, publicly expressed more comfort with the American component of their bicultural identities (i.e., the periphery of their bicultural identities). This expression of attachment did not become very apparent until much later in the intervention, when the core

participants openly reflected upon their experiences in the United States with a sense of nostalgia and affection.

## Discussion

### Consistencies within individuals and the activity

Based on the findings of this study, there was also evidence of some consistencies within individuals and the activity. While some of the initial purposes behind the activity remained constant through the course of the intervention, providing students with opportunities to express their identification with mainstream American culture and practice speaking English in a non-threatening setting, the theme of differentiating between “us” and “them” prevailed during the times that we met together. Both Tina and Sook expressed some sense of adhering to this distinction, in similar ways. For instance, throughout the course of the intervention, both core participants consistently demonstrated a strong sense of identification to their native culture, attributing their native culture to the core of their bicultural identities. Tina’s devotion to her native beliefs and ideals became apparent in her consistent identification with traditional grandparent characters in the literature we read. She also made overt references to who she considered to be “us” and who she considered to be “them.” Nonetheless, she expressed a desire to learn more about mainstream American culture because she knew that she was not going back to Nepal to live.

Sook, on the other hand, knew that she would return to Korea at the end of the academic year. She had also spent less time in the United States than the other participants (i.e., 2.5 years). Perhaps as a result, she had inflexible views of



her identity. She viewed herself as “forever Asian” and repeatedly conveyed the idea that it would be difficult, if not impossible, for a teenager to achieve a balance between participation in two cultures. In her opinion, one culture would eventually have to take precedence over the other.

Both core participants also emphasized the gap that they perceived to exist between their home and school worlds. They expressed that for them, “home” represented their native culture (i.e., what they attributed to the core of their bicultural identities) and a place of comfort. Conversely, “school” represented mainstream American culture (i.e., what they attributed to the periphery of their bicultural identities) and a place that caused them some tension and uneasiness in their every day lives. In effect, they did not feel that they could express themselves comfortably in the school setting.

The important development of a “safe place” at the intersection of home and school

The individual/activity “system” that developed over the course of roughly four and a half months developed into a reliable and trustworthy forum for participants to make their bicultural identity issues and concerns explicit, conscious, and semi-public. It became apparent that students experienced some sense of comfort in having a safe place to express their triumphs and frustrations. It is important to note that this safe place was *not* provided by the home or the school, which were two social institutions that participants found themselves moving between on a daily basis. Although the activity physically took place in the school setting, it shifted from being “school-like” to becoming more “non school-like” in nature over the course of the intervention.

The transition that participants experienced could be described as a *mediating transition*, which involved the mediation of a “third place” (i.e., the literacy activity) between the worlds of home and school (see Beach, 1999). The creation of this third social institution was initially tied to the school, in that it resembled a typical academic setting and was held within the context of an actual school. Over the course of time, the literacy activity became less and less “school-like” in nature, and provided students with an organized means through which they could explore and possibly alleviate tensions related to their bicultural identities, and in the process, form friendships with individuals who had undergone some similar experiences. This finding points to the psychological importance of providing immigrant students with non-academic opportunities to explore and discuss their personal issues and concerns, as a way of helping them develop less tension-filled bicultural identity struggles.

## CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

### A changing vision...

When I originally developed my ideas for this study, I had a particular image in my mind. I envisioned avid participation by students who were eager to explore and creatively express their identity struggles in a safe, reassuring environment. I imagined that club meetings would be well attended, and that I would have a vast and diverse array of regular participants. Lastly, and in retrospect, somewhat naively, I thought the agenda that I had developed for the club would run smoothly as planned, perhaps with a few slight modifications.

Things turned out quite differently than I had originally envisioned. Although thirteen students did in fact express interest in participating in this literacy activity, only five of these students showed up to any club meetings. Three out of these thirteen students had expressed a lot of enthusiasm about joining during the initial interview, but because of other after school commitments were not able to participate in any club meetings. Out of the five students who actually attended club meetings, two had to drop out after a month because they were members of the tennis team that met in the spring. In the end, only two students ended up attending club meetings, a much smaller number than the 8-10 students that I had planned to recruit when I first started developing my ideas for this study. Furthermore, these two students were both recent immigrants to the United States. Their needs and purposes behind participating in the activity did not always mesh with my initial plan. As a result, I sometimes found myself

restructuring the ideas that I had originally stated in my proposal in order to better accommodate their experiences, as well as make our meetings more productive.

Despite these obstacles in carrying out the initial plan for the study, much was gained from this experience. The two core participants, Sook and Tina, were able to explore many of the cultural adjustment issues that they faced in their transitions to the United States. Both students had expressed that they had difficulty communicating in English. The club provided them with opportunities to practice their second language, both through reading stories out loud and through oral discussion about the literature and their personal experiences. In the last interview, Tina told me that the club had helped her become more comfortable expressing herself in English. She was now participating more actively in her academic classes. Sook went one step further to talk about how participation in the club had helped combat her earlier feelings of alienation and apprehension:

Sapna: Did participating in this club help you with any particular things that were going on in our life?

Sook: It gave me a lot of joy. Every time I used to come here [school], I felt like I was an outsider. I don't feel like I am an outsider now. We [Sook, Tina, and Sapna] can talk about anything and we feel the same way, so I feel so good. (Int #2)

Hence, for Sook, participation in the club provided her with a sense of affiliation that she could not find elsewhere. She experienced a sense of belongingness, as she was accepted and liked by individuals who valued her unique experiences as a recent Asian immigrant.

Because the club focused on participants' experiences in two cultures, not just their "home" or (parents') native culture, it became an organized forum for

increasing their exposure to bicultural issues, as well as providing a “safe place” for recent immigrant students to comfortably talk and relate to one another about this newer influence on their lives: mainstream American culture. As became evident in interviews with participants, cultural and religious activities outside of the school setting (such as attending religious institutions and classes or socializing with recent immigrant families of similar backgrounds) offered participants some cultural exposure, but were not necessarily geared towards exposing individuals to the culture of mainstream American society. Also, during such activities, participants were often encouraged to speak in their (or parents’) native language, offering them limited out of school experiences to practice speaking English. During club meetings, on the other hand, participants who were recent immigrants could practice their English in a non-academic setting and not have to worry about being assessed or corrected by others. This practice often led them to be more confident and comfortable in the school setting.

In addition, during club meetings participants were able to openly discuss deeply personal issues that they could not share with their parents at home. If they wanted to talk about dating or going to the Prom, they could share their thoughts with the rest of the group. The first generation students, in particular would not be able to share these “non traditional” topics with their parents at home without being scolded. This was one more way that participants could express their feelings of identification with aspects of mainstream American society in the club.

I believe that by expressing an interest and concern in the recent immigrant experience and providing a supportive and sympathetic environment for these students, I was able to gain the trust and friendship of these two individuals. As Phelan, Davidson, and Yu (1996) suggest in their research on high school students' transitions between different "worlds," these "caring" messages may be especially for students who come from culturally different backgrounds. After Sook returned to Korea, she wrote me several email messages, expressing that she was happy and thankful that she had participated in the club, and had the opportunity to become close to Tina and I. Tina (who is currently participating in the STAR program at Michigan State University) and I have met in person and talked about her new experiences at the university. Hence, although some of the original plans for my dissertation did not run as smoothly as planned, there were many positive outcomes that came about as a result of the creation of the club.

#### Revisiting my research questions

From a theoretical standpoint, this study helps us uncover the relational quality of identity making, and in effect, enables us to better understand the experiences of bicultural individuals. My earlier study (Vyas, 1998) focused on a sample of second generation Indian high school students who provided the foundation for an initial theoretical conceptualization of bicultural identity. Through studying the identity experiences of students of different Asian backgrounds, generational statuses, and genders, I was able to develop an alternative theoretical model of bicultural identity and as a result, was able to

illustrate the vast range of bicultural identification that exists within Asian subcultures.

It is likely that this variation exists in other cultures as well, but this model contributes to existing research by exemplifying how individual variation exists not only between, but also *within* cultures that share similar worldviews. Furthermore, it accentuates the role of individual agency in the identity making process, by demonstrating how Asian immigrant high school students make different attributions to the core and periphery of their bicultural identities, affecting the level of identity-related tension that they experience in their every day lives. As detailed in the individual diagrams in Chapter 5, the participants of this study negotiated between the different aspects of their bicultural identities in multiple ways (hence, the bicultural classifications represented by the individual diagrams). For some participants, this process involved a minimal amount of tension and discomfort, and for others, it involved a lot of personal stress and introspection.

Furthermore, the idea of periphery meant different things in different individual cases. For some students, such as Girish and Sagar, there was no distinction made between what constituted the core and periphery. Participants such as Sook, Tina, and Wai-Ling attributed cultural transition and adjustment-related issues (learning a new language, feeling comfortable in mainstream American society) to the periphery aspects of their bicultural identities, though the degrees of tension that they experienced in the relationship between the core and periphery of their bicultural identities varied. Lastly, participants such as

Ramesh and Anita attributed “being Asian” to the periphery of their bicultural identities, as they expressed a minimal desire to keep in touch with their parents’ native roots.

It was necessary to keep this individual variation in mind in creating and sustaining this literacy activity, in order to best suit the needs of these participants, especially those who struggled with ongoing tensions in relation to their sense of identity. As a facilitator and a friend, it was important for me to be in tune with students’ interests and needs, in order for our meetings to be worthwhile and productive. Over the course of time, the different manifestations of the individual-activity relationship pointed to the valuable role of this “third space” created at the intersection of home and school. This space, which shifted from being “school-like” to becoming “non school-like” in nature, provided students with a safe meeting ground that did not force them to choose or conform to the norms and standards of one culture over the other; rather, it allowed them to explore their puzzlement and concerns, and to share their insight and perspectives on the experiences they had while moving between their many different worlds.

#### Limitations of this study

There are obvious limitations to this study. Because this intervention only met over the course of roughly four months, it only provided me with a “developmental snapshot” of the participants’ identity experiences. Although the core participants attended almost every meeting, I was not able to document any major changes in their attitudes, beliefs, and thoughts during the course of the



club. If the club had met over a longer period of time, it is likely that participants' responses would have changed from the beginning to the end. It was apparent that for some students, such as Sook and Tina, participation in the club did bring some issues of identity to consciousness, as they may not have reflected a lot on the influences of their experiences in the United States before being in the club. Given that we met over a short period of time, the literature club proved more to be an extended opportunity to learn about students' identity struggles rather than functioning as an actual intervention.

Because the majority of participants in this study did not attend club meetings regularly, my analyses primarily focused on the experiences of two individuals who were both female and 1<sup>st</sup> generation immigrants, although they had different Asian backgrounds. In order to obtain a more complete picture of the multiple ways that individuals of Asian descent progress towards a tension-lessened sense of bicultural identity it would have been more fruitful to be able to assess change over time in individuals of different generations and genders. Since participation in club meetings was so inconsistent (with participation ranging from one interview to attending all club meetings), it was not viable to make club-related comparisons between participants of different genders and generational backgrounds. Such comparisons would have provided me with a more comprehensive representation of how bicultural individuals experience processes of identity making and negotiation between two cultures.

This study began with a diverse array of students of various generational statuses and Asian backgrounds and resulted with a very small group of 1<sup>st</sup>

generation female students of various Asian backgrounds. Because of these changes in the participant pool, there are multiple and perhaps more complex interpretations available by which we may explain the outcomes of this study.

### Implications for future research

#### Broadening the research focus

The study of bicultural students' identity development between home and school can also be viewed more broadly in the context of education, as transitions that all children may endure at some point in their experiences between different worlds. In the future, I think it is necessary to widen the focus to the experiences of students of various ages and minority groups who may face continuities and discontinuities related to culture, language, socioeconomic background, and gender. It is essential to continue approaching the topic of home-school transitions through the lens of identity, as identity formation is a crucial process during the course of human development. Furthermore, research studies that involve in-depth interviews and/or observations with the major individuals who are involved in a particular student's transition between home and school (such as parents, peers, and teachers) may give us a more complete picture of what is taking place in his/her personal and academic life.

#### Providing support for 1<sup>st</sup> generation immigrant students

It is important for us to offer continued support in the form of bicultural forums (either within or outside of school settings) in order to better understand the learning and developmental experiences of students who are seeking guidance and support amidst participation in two different worlds. Providing

recent immigrants with opportunities to acclimate to their new environment in various ways (e.g., being able to practice English), both within and outside of the school setting, will help ease their feelings of discomfort and stress in the transition to a new country and school.

#### Recommendations to teachers about literacy activities

Based on the results of this study, it becomes evident that the question of identity is not an issue of whether the students are better adapted to one culture or the other. This study illustrates a wide range of bicultural identification, and points to very different implications for individual processes of learning and development across different cultural worlds. As Jean Lave explicates in her work, identity craftwork is a primary developmental project that students engage in, and the acquisition of skills and knowledge is organized by the crafting of our identities (Lave, 1996). Because how and what we learn is organized through our sense of who we are, and what we are becoming, future research should focus on exploring means by which teachers may be involved in the creation and support of literacy activities that can help facilitate the process of identity making; for instance, ways that teachers may create activities within the confines of the classroom, which will lay the groundwork for the advancement of literacy and the creation of "safe spaces" for students to read, write, and discuss issues related to identity. Some suggestions include the following:

- Students need to experience feelings of trust and understanding when they are sharing their personal stories about their transitions between their different worlds. Teachers should be aware and supportive of students' diverse experiences, and should be prepared for situations that are private or emotional in nature.

- Teachers should address a variety of themes and topics in relation to students' identity making experiences. Some themes, such as family and friendships, may be common to most students' experiences. Other themes, such as culture clash and personal relationships may be more relevant for some students, and not others. Teachers should carefully select literary works that reflect an assortment of different themes and topics, so all students can find a sense of personal relevance in classroom literacy activities.
- Teachers should rely on the use of a variety of different literacy mediums to keep students engaged in literacy activities. A combination of reading, writing and oral discussion activities should help sustain students' interest by curbing any sense of monotony in the classroom routine. Furthermore, some students prefer to express themselves orally, while others feel more comfortable in writing situations. Having a variety of different literacy mediums will ensure that students are able to express themselves in the manner that they enjoy the most.

Research studies, such as this dissertation, offer us indispensable opportunities to uncover the intricacies of bicultural students' processes of identity making. As researchers, educators, family members, and peers, it is necessary for us to address the voices of bicultural students, and provide them with ample opportunities to be heard in the educational community. With an increased understanding and awareness of bicultural issues, we will be able to ensure that these students are better equipped to deal with the range of identity issues that will inevitably arise in their lives in the future.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A: COVER LETTER/CONSENT FORM

Dear Student and Parent/Guardian,

Hello, my name is Sapna Vyas. I am currently a fourth year doctoral candidate in the Educational Psychology program at Michigan State University. In collaboration with my faculty advisor, Dr. King Beach, I am conducting a research project that focuses on the experiences of Asian teenagers growing up in the United States. This area of research is of personal interest because of my own experience growing up and participating in Indian and mainstream American cultures. I am interested in learning about the experiences of Asian youths, and how they experience their participation in two different cultures.

I would like to invite you to participate in this research. This January, I am starting an Asian literature club at your high school. The purpose of this club, which will meet weekly over the course of approximately five months, is for students of Asian backgrounds to come together and explore issues that are relevant in their lives. In this club, we will read literature by Asian authors, have lively and sometimes controversial conversations about Asians' experiences in the United States, and will work towards creating a creative literary magazine that showcases students' experiences in various Asian and mainstream American cultures.

Students who participate in all aspects of this study will receive a gift certificate redeemable at an area bookstore. You may indicate your voluntary participation by completing the consent form that is attached to this letter. Please keep in mind that you can feel free to withdraw from this study at any time if you wish.

Please call or email me if you have any questions. I hope to hear from you!

Sincerely,

Sapna Vyas  
Doctoral Candidate at Michigan State University  
(248) 681-1121  
sapnavyas@yahoo.com

You are being invited to participate in this research study. The researcher's main purpose is to gain insight on the cultural experiences of Asian teenagers growing up in the United States. You will be asked to regularly attend club meetings, do the written assignments within these meetings, answer two questionnaires, and participate in three 30-60 minute interviews.

The club meetings will be videotaped, and interviews will be audio taped. You may refuse to answer any questions or stop the course of a given interview at any time. You may ask the tape recorder to be turned off at any point of an interview. Your real name, as well as any identifying information about yourself, will be deleted or protected with pseudonyms in any report of research findings. Your identity may be known to the principal investigator but will be kept confidential. Your privacy will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. At any time during the study, you may refuse to provide information or discontinue your participation with no negative consequences.

Name of Participant (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian Signature (required): \_\_\_\_\_

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

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

## **APPENDIX B: FLYER**

- **Interested in exploring vital issues faced by Asian teenagers in the United States?**
- **Interested in participating in creative reading and writing activities?**
- **Please consider joining the NEW Asian Literature Club!!**

The Asian Literature Club is a new after school club offered this year. The purpose of this club is for students of Asian backgrounds to come together and explore issues that are relevant in our lives. In this club, we will read literature by Asian authors, have lively and sometimes controversial conversations about Asians' experiences in the United States, and will work towards creating a creative literary magazine that showcases students' experiences in various Asian and mainstream American cultures.

**Please feel free to contact Sapna Vyas via email ([sapnavyas@yahoo.com](mailto:sapnavyas@yahoo.com)) or telephone (248-681-1121) if you have any questions.**

**Hope to see you there!!**

**\*This club is part of a research project for my Ph.D. degree**

## APPENDIX C: DESCRIPTIVE PROFILE ACTIVITY

**Directions:** Look closely at the photograph that you have been given. Based on your initial impressions of the person in the photograph, fill in the following information. Have fun, and be creative!

**Age** \_\_\_\_\_

**Occupation** \_\_\_\_\_

**Where do you think this person grew up? Describe the locale.**

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**Socioeconomic background (e.g., poor, middle class, upper middle class)**

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**Ethnic or Cultural Background**

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**What do you think this person likes to do in his/her spare time? Hobbies?**

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**What kind of music does he/she like to listen to?**

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**What is his/her favorite food?**

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**What kind of car does he/she drive?**

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**Is this person in a relationship with someone? If so, describe the person he/she is involved with. Is he/she male or female? Do they share the same ethnic/cultural background? Are they dating or married?**

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**What are this person's long-term goals?**

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**What does he/she value?**

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## APPENDIX D: EXAMPLES OF LITERATURE

\*Both examples are from Roshni Rustomji-Kern's anthology, entitled Living in America: Poetry and Fiction by South Asian American Writers

**Example #1=** "What's in a Name?", by Rashmi Sharma

Am I Krishnamurthi or Chris?  
Varhamana or 'R.D.'  
Vijaya or Victor?  
Markandaya or Mark  
Shailendra or Shelly?

What's in a name, you ask?  
My very identity, the genesis of who I am.  
But who am I?  
Am I Indian or an American?  
Or the hyphenated, split personality of 'Indo-American'?

My parents name me  
but society renames me.  
Which am I to be?  
Should others define who I am?  
Should I, could I, figure out who I am?

My heritage and my future  
are the poles that pull me apart,  
Wrenching me in half.  
Doomed forever to never really belong completely in one culture.  
I know not whether I am part of a 'melting pot' or part of a 'fruit salad'.

My parents' value of their cultural heritage, and mine,  
Are what's in my name.  
I am no more less than others who also came  
To this unique experiment in freedom, this nation of immigrants.  
I am who I am.

**Example #2=** "Can You Talk Mexican?", by Amita Vasudeva

"Can you talk Mexican?"  
They used to ask me.  
"No, I'm not Mexican I'm Indian, and besides they speak Spanish," I used  
to reply, waiting eagerly for their best attempt at doing a "raindance."  
"Owowow ooh ow ow." Smacking outstretched palms to their little  
mouths and hopping around.  
"Not THAT kind of Indian-Indian from India,"  
I would correct, as soon as they finished whooping.  
"Oh....Can you talk Indian?"

## APPENDIX E: LIST OF CLUB READINGS/FILMS

### **Short Stories:**

*Bacon and Coffee* - Wen-Wen C. Wang

*Homecoming* - Ching-Fei Chang

*Doors* - Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni

*Rain Music* - Longhang Nguyen

### **Poetry:**

*Stained Glass Window* - Sanjeev Kaila

*What's in a name?* - Rashmi Sharma

*Can you talk Mexican?* - Amita Vasudeva

*My Place* - Sanjeev Kaila

### **Children's Books:**

*The Bracelet* - Yoshiko Uchida

*The Ugly Vegetables* - Grace Lin

*Tea with Milk* - Allen Say

*Grandfather's Journey* - Allen Say

### **Movies:**

*Joy Luck Club*

*Mississippi Masala*



## APPENDIX F: QUESTIONNAIRES

### Questionnaire #1:

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_

Place of Birth \_\_\_\_\_ (if not the USA, please indicate how long you have been in this country)

Male Female (please circle)

Home telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Are you willing to participate in three interviews?

Yes No (please circle)

Parent Signature \_\_\_\_\_

#### A. Cultural Background

Do you consider yourself Asian, American, or a combination of the two?

Explain

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Do you speak an Asian language? If yes, please indicate level of proficiency (e.g., fluent, can speak but not write)

Explain

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**B. Reading and Writing Experiences**

**Are you currently taking any literature or writing courses? What are your reasons for participating in these courses?**

**Explain**

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**What type (s) of literature do you like to read?**

**Explain**

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**Do you like to write? What types of writing activities do you like to engage in?**

**Explain**

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**What are your hobbies?**

**Explain**

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**Favorite Movies?**

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**Favorite Music?**

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**C. Feedback**

**Why are you interested in participating in this club? What would you like to gain, if anything?**

**Explain**

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**Do you have any suggestions for the club (e.g., choices of literature, particular activities, etc.)? Please feel free to share them here!**

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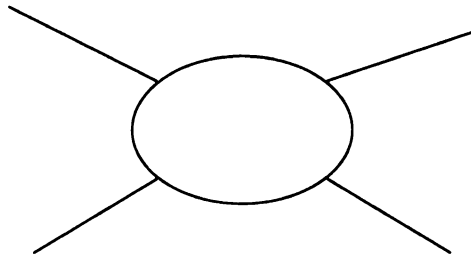
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### **Identity Map (included in both questionnaires)**

The oval in this diagram represents you. On each line that is connected to the oval, write down something that influences your sense of identity, or who you are.



Now, pick two of the influences that you wrote in the diagram, and explain why you chose them.

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Name \_\_\_\_\_

**Questionnaire #2:**

What did you hope to gain (if anything) by participating in this club? Do you feel like you did?

Explain

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What aspects of this club did you like?

Explain

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What aspects of this club did you dislike?

Explain

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Through participating in this club, what did you learn about yourself?

Explain

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What would you change about this club if you were to run it next year?

Explain

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Do you have any suggestions for future meetings of this club? Please feel free to share them here!

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## APPENDIX G: INTERVIEWS

### Interview #1:

- 1) Tell me a little bit about your home. (If a stranger were to see your home for the first time, would he/she be able to tell that an Asian family lives there? Does it have any qualities or characteristics that make it uniquely Asian?)
- 2) What language(s) do you speak at home? Is this (these) the same language(s) you speak at school? (if more than 1) Do you prefer speaking one language over the other? Why?
- 3) Tell me a little bit about your family.(When did you or your parents come over from Asia? What are your ties to your relatives, if any? When were you last there?)
- 4) How often does your family participate in cultural/religious activities and rituals? (Some kids feel comfortable participating in such activities, because they are familiar with them and have participated in them since they were young, and others may not feel quite as comfortable, because these rituals are not so common in their everyday lives. How about you?) Do you enjoy being active in activities/traditions that reflect your Asian background?
- 5) Tell me about your experiences in school. Do you find schoolwork to be culturally and/or personally meaningful to you?
- 6) Do you feel more comfortable hanging out with Asian classmates, non-Asian classmates, or does it not matter to you? Do your parents prefer you to associate with one group over the other?

- 7) Some people talk about the home and school as being two different "cultural worlds". What do you think they mean by this? (By this, they mean that these two different settings have different rules in terms of cultural values, expectations, and ways of behaving) Based on your own experiences in home and school, do you agree with this idea? Why or why not?
- 8) Do you view yourself as "Asian", "American", or a combination of the two? Why?
- 9) Let's go back in time to the times when you were in middle school. Would you have answered this first question the same way as you do now? Why or why not? How has your response changed or not changed? Do you see yourself the same way in the future?
- 10) Tell me how the following statement applies or does not apply to you: "In some situations I feel Asian and in others I don't"
- 11) Some Asian parents express the fear that Asian teenagers today are losing sight of the Asian aspects of their identities, and are choosing to identify more strongly with mainstream American culture. Do you think that Asian teenagers can be involved in mainstream American society without losing sight of their sense of ethnic identity? How so?
- 12) Some Asian teenagers in the US find themselves trying to balance between two cultures. Tell me what you think about this idea. Does this or does this not apply to you in your experiences?
- 13) Can you remember a specific event or incident of tremendous significance (either good or bad) that affected your view of yourself (as bicultural) in some way? How did you feel then? How do you feel now, when you think about this specific event or incident?



**Interview #2:**

- 1) Which piece of literature (that we have read in the club) have you enjoyed the most so far? Why did you enjoy this piece?
- 2) What piece of literature did you enjoy the least? Why?
- 3) As you know by now, we read literature in this club and then talk and write about our own experiences. What do you think about this? How do you feel when you are expressing yourself in writing? How do you feel when you are saying your thoughts out loud during a club discussion?
- 4) Can you think of any particular times in this club where you found yourself identifying with a certain character or aspect of the plot in a piece of literature that we have read in this club (or you felt like you were a lot like a certain character, or your life was similar to the plot in one of the stories, poems, or movies?) Could you tell me about this experience?
- 5) What is your favorite book? Why?
- 6) If you could pick one character in a book that is a lot like you, who would you pick? Why would you pick this character?
- 7) How did participating in this club affect your views on what it is to be an Asian teenager growing up in the US?
- 8) Did participating in this club help you deal with any particular concerns or matters in your life? How so?
- 9) Based on your experiences in the club, do you think it is possible to engage in schoolwork (such as reading and writing) and have these experiences be culturally and/or personally meaningful to you?

- 10) In January, I asked you the following question: "Some people talk about the home and school as being two different 'cultural worlds'. What do you think they mean by this?" Based on your own experiences in home and school, do you agree with this idea? Why or why not?". Would your answer be the same now as before? (If it hasn't changed, then why do you think you feel this way still? If your answer has changed, what do you think has contributed to this change?)
- 11) In answering the question "Do you view yourself as "Asian", "American", or a combination of the two?" in January, you said that you viewed yourself as \_\_\_\_\_. Would your answer be the same now? (If it hasn't changed, then why do you think you feel this way still? If your answer has changed, what do you think has contributed to this change?)
- 12) In January, I asked you the following question: "Let's go back in time to the times when you were in middle school. Would you have answered this first question the same way as you do now? Why or why not? How has your response changed or not changed? Do you see yourself the same way in the future?". Would your answer be the same now as it was before? (If it hasn't changed, then why do you think you feel this way still? If your answer has changed, what do you think has contributed to this change?)
- 13) In answering the question, "Tell me how the following statement applies or does not apply to you: 'In some situations I feel Asian and in others I don't'" in January, you said \_\_\_\_\_. Would your answer be the same now? (If it hasn't changed, then why do you think you feel this way still? If your answer has changed, what do you think has contributed to this change?)

- 14) In January, I asked you the following question: "Some Asian parents express the fear that Asian teenagers today are losing sight of the Asian aspects of their identities, and are choosing to identify more strongly with mainstream American culture. Do you think that Asian teenagers can be involved in mainstream American society without losing sight of their sense of ethnic identity? How so?" Would your answer be the same now as before? (If it hasn't changed, then why do you think you feel this way still? If your answer has changed, what do you think has contributed to this change?)
- 15) In January, I asked you the following question: "Some Asian teenagers in the US find themselves trying to balance between two cultures. Tell me what you think about this idea. Does this or does this not apply to you in your experiences?" Would your answer be the same now as before? (If it hasn't changed, then why do you think you feel this way still? If your answer has changed, what do you think has contributed to this change?)

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