

Relative (Dis)Privilege: Complicating Ideas Regarding East and South Asian American Youth

By

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
(Educational Policy Studies)

at the

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

2022

Date of final oral examination: 8/4/2022

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Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I thank God for His unfailing love. By the grace of God, I am who I am today (1 Corinthians 15:10). God is the reason behind everything I do and through Him, I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Philippians 4:13).

I am forever grateful to my 엄마 and 아빠 who gave me unconditional love and support and who have sacrificed so much to provide me with everything I need to fulfill my goals and dreams. I learned what love and sacrifice are through my devoted parents, who are my greatest cheerleaders. They have always been there even when I was at my lowest lows and doubted myself. I am especially thankful to my mother who has always been a fighter for gender justice and for empowering me to continue my studies. Thank you for sacrificing your wishes and dreams to provide me with the educational opportunities that only some could ever dream of. I also thank the rest of the Hong and Chun family—my one and only brother, Josh, 친할머니, 외할머니, 외할아버지, uncles, aunts, and cousins.

Although my 친할아버지 has passed away many years ago, I know that he has looked out for me from above and has been my greatest supporter. I am very proud to be a granddaughter of someone who has dedicated his whole life to advancing educational equity during Korea's modern education reform after the Korean War. The way he founded an all-girls middle and high school in Incheon, South Korea, and fought for girls' access to education, has always been admirable to me. My father who continued my grandfather's vision as a teacher and then a principal at that school, worked tirelessly to provide educational opportunities to students from working-class families. I hope to continue my grandfather's and father's enduring passion and legacy through my work and share their dream of fostering equity-oriented learning environments for students from the most marginalized groups.

I could not have come this far without my advisor, Stacey J. Lee, who has taught me how to grow as a scholar and a better person. I truly thank her for not giving up on me. Without her patience, guidance, and support all these years, I would have never made it this far. I also thank Taucia González and Mariana Pacheco for trusting in me and letting me learn and work alongside them. I thank Lesley Bartlett for leading me in the right direction whenever I was stuck with my research designs. Thank you to Linn Posey-Maddox for serving on my committee and sharing your invaluable insights. I am grateful to Madeline Hafner for being so caring and seeing the potential of my work. I am also thankful to Nancy Kendall, Bianca Baldrige, and Erica Turner for their encouragement and support throughout my journey.

I am especially very fortunate to have shared decades of memories and genuine friendships with Yeonjoo Kim, Hyejoo Kim, Julie Her, Seul Lee, and Daye Song. They have always been there for me when I felt I was alone on this journey. I am also thankful to have made all the lifelong friends at UW including Ye Rang Park, Sohyun Kang, Dosun Ko, Edgar Valles, Bo Hyun Park, Yoona Kim, and Taehyun Kong. Madison Sah-Lang Church provided me with a loving community and for that, I am especially grateful to Pastor Paul Choi, Eunha Song, my sisters and brothers in Christ, and the ESC Youth Group.

Lastly, I would like to thank all the youths and adults who let me into their lives and generously shared their stories, perspectives, and voices with me. This project would not have been possible without their kindness and commitment to sparking a change in how we understand the lives of young people, especially those from the Asian-American community. I hope my writing has portrayed their lives truthfully and that I have done them right by sharing their insights through this dissertation.

Abstract

My dissertation focuses on East and South Asian American youths' understandings and negotiations of racialized neoliberal discourses and processes as well as their racial/ethnic identities. I examine how the Chinese, Indian, and Korean American youth at a predominately white Midwest suburban public high school navigate through racialized neoliberal ideologies, as well as make sense of their racial positionings. The eight-month ethnography primarily drew from participant observation during the 2019–2020 school year until the school closure in March 2020 due to COVID-19, as well as interviews with Chinese, Indian, and Korean American students and their families and schoolteachers. The use of ethnography provided me with the opportunity to take seriously the local conditions around students' sense-making and the contexts that inform the multifaceted Asian experience and learning around race, including their racial identities and positionings and negotiation of racial discourses about themselves and others.

My research seeks to expand on these youth constructs and negotiate the intersections of their hybrid identities as they navigate through heterogeneous sociocultural worlds (i.e., school, home, and community spaces). Furthermore, it identifies the tensions and conflicts they encounter as manifestations of ideologies prevalent in the racially stratified U.S. society. The ethnographic account consists of discussions around how Asian American youth are placed at the confluence of white supremacy and anti-Blackness and are subjected to racialization in contradicting ways. Despite the youth's unique racial position as the model minority having relative racial privilege, most are left feeling overlooked by the school system; the Asian youth are not only not white, they are minorities within a minority. In addition to how the Asian youth suffers from a social justice blind spot, my research also reveals how their internalization of the model minority and perpetual foreigner stereotypes, coupled with their middle-class standing,

render the group as lacking awareness of their anti-Blackness. The Asian American youth in my study were complicit in anti-Blackness through their indifference, passivity, and “innocence” towards the school’s perpetual rationing and privations of equal opportunities for Black and Brown students.

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Chapter One: Introduction

The diverse communities under the broad “Asian American” label have had complicated histories in terms of their groupings, naming, and positionings ever since their arrival on the U.S. shores. The continued ambiguity and precarity around the racial identities of Asian Americans have led to a sense of relative racial privilege (S. J. Lee et al., 2017) and marginality (Kibria, 1998). Though the ascribed and self-given identities have been constantly amended and contested, the Asian American label has been largely narrowed down to the prevailing idea that Asians are a “model minority” and “perpetual foreigners” in the U.S. Despite how Asians have been essentialized down to two dominant discourses, the members of the heterogeneous communities have continued their struggle to negotiate their racialization within the structure of race formation in the U.S. Through schooling, youth are positioned to negotiate these forces of dominant racialization in the matrix of privilege and oppression. This dissertation focuses on the role of schooling as well as how Asian American youths engage in institutional practices to respond and counter the overly simplistic idealization of Asian Americans as model minority and marginalization of the group as perpetual foreigners.

Despite the growing number of Asian Americans and their children in schools in the U.S., their perspectives and experiences remain understudied and are often left out during discussions on race in educational research. Thus, gaining a more nuanced understanding of Asian American education is critical and essential in exploring the intersectional experiences of historically marginalized people and the racial landscape in the U.S. However, my dissertation is built upon the prominent contributions of scholars focusing on Asian American education and critical educational research (S. J. Lee, 1996, 2005; Lew, 2004; Louie, 2004). The existing scholarship has foregrounded capturing the diverse educational experiences and opportunities

that are unique to Asian American communities. Along this line of research, my dissertation seeks to expand on how East Asian (EA) and South Asian (SA) American youth construct ideas about race and negotiate the intersections of their hybrid identities and they navigate an educational system. The project also seeks to observe how they conform, maintain, perpetuate, or resist the dominant racialized narratives and ideologies presented largely through schooling.

This dissertation is designed upon the critical works on Asian American education and the racial inequities that Asian communities face in the U.S. Existing research has resulted in widespread consciousness of how racialized discourses of Asian groups are rooted in endemic racism and are harmful not just to Asians but to all. However, this dissertation extends the important discussion by examining the continuing significance of the idea of Asian Americans as “model minority” and “perpetual foreigner.” To resume the efforts of bringing Asian Americans’ perspectives and experiences at the forefront of understanding how they make sense of and negotiate dominant narratives around race, this project is dedicated to exploring how East and South Asian youth, who are reckoned as “model” among racial minorities and yet innately foreign, navigate the school system as they make sense and perhaps resist and/or reproduce dominant racialized narratives. The study is guided by the following two main questions:

- 1) How do educational experiences of East and South Asian American youths shape their understandings of race, including their racial identities and positionings?
- 2) What roles do educational policies and practices play in shaping, reflecting, and perpetuating the dominant racializing narratives?

The dissertation is also dedicated to shedding light on the voices and insights of students, teachers, staff, and parents who generously let me come along with them on a journey. The following findings are drawn from eight months of ethnographic fieldwork, and I intend to share

their stories authentically, albeit with a political intent of disrupting racial hierarchy in school systems. Based on the stories shared with me, I aim to reveal how students of color are racialized through a schooling system influenced by the larger social forces that continue to shape the dominant narratives around race. To provide a comprehensive understanding of the findings that are to follow, I provide a review of prior literature on the racialization of Asian Americans, specifically East and South Asian communities, as the designated “model minority” and “perpetual foreigners.”

The Term “Asian American”

The 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, also known as the Hart-Cellar Act, accepted immigrants of all nationalities for the first time in U.S. history. Since the implementation of this act, Asian American communities have rapidly grown and dispersed throughout the country. Compared to most immigrants coming in from Europe during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, from the 1980s, people immigrating to the U.S. comprised mostly Asians and Latinx. This pattern has only continued through the 21st century, and in 2019, the total Asian population rose to 22.4 million, making up 7% of the U.S. population (Budiman & Ruiz, 2021). By 2055, Asian Americans are projected to count as the largest immigrant group, and the number is expected to surpass 46 million by 2060 (Budiman & Ruiz, 2021). However, as Asian ethnic groups entered the U.S. shores, they entered a society where they are now simply identified as “Asian Americans” or “Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI).” People who have ancestral origins in South Asia (e.g., Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka), Southeast Asia (e.g., Cambodia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam), and East Asia (e.g., China, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan) are lumped into the Asian category. As a generic term unique to the U.S., Asian American is used to racialize the pan-ethnic group as a monolith, within which the inter-

ethnic sociocultural diversity gets ignored. J. Z. Park (2008) posits how monolithic cultural discourse associated with the term Asian Americans “focuses on a racialization motif that emphasizes ‘Asian-ness’ by deemphasizing interethnic cultural diversity” (p. 542).

The term “Asian Americans” gained a life of its own and was used to strategically serve the political interests of Asians. History confirms that Asian Americans have been fighting against larger sociopolitical discourses rooted in anti-Asian racism ever since Asian immigrants arrived on the U.S. shores. To achieve shared political interests, Asian activists and communities embraced the term “Asian Americans,” which encompasses a pan-ethnic identity, and formed political, cultural, and community organizations to end oppression through trans-ethnic solidarities (E. Lee, 2015). While a new wave of Asian immigrants began arriving in the 1960s and 1970s, a grassroots political mobilization known as the Asian American movement started within diverse Asian communities to work in coalitions toward dismantling social injustice against Asians and demanding recognition and empowerment (Wu, 2002). The new generation of activists expanded the movements of their predecessors who had fought against racism at home and abroad (E. Lee, 2015).

The Model Minority Stereotype

Historically, Asian Americans have been positioned as a racialized minority and most often suffer from overly generalized characterizations such as model minorities and perpetual foreigners. The model minority rhetoric casts Asian Americans as hardworking, obedient, successful, and therefore proof that equal opportunities exist, and that racism can be overcome. Asian Americans have been exploited as a racial wedge to disconfirm systematic inequality and legitimize whiteness as the norm. Despite the ubiquitous notion that the model minority stereotype presumably works toward Asians because it appears positive and innocuous, it

endures as a discriminatory conception of Asian Americans that feeds into the prevailing ideologies of racial hierarchy and racism.

Literature demonstrates that model minority stereotype exclusively connected to those of Asian descent is a fallacy. J. Lee and Zhou (2015) posit that Asian American communities are inclined to construct a narrow frame of success (e.g., earning a degree from elite universities and having professional jobs) due to “hyper-selectivity” and “high-selectivity” in the process of immigration among the population from Asian countries. However, considering that the model minority rhetoric is deeply embedded in the fabric of the U.S. society, as well as within the ethnic-racial identities and cultures of Asian American communities, Asian Americans often adopt high academic aspirations manifested through pursuing and performing the model minority stereotype.

Asian Americans have consistently attempted to live up to the expectations after being labeled as a model minority, to resist racism and prejudices in the U.S. (S. J. Lee, 2009). These students are not oblivious to racism and racial inequalities in society, so they seek their way of resisting racism by doing well in school (S. J. Lee, 2009). Asian students knowingly accept the stereotype and perform well to protect themselves from racism and discrimination. Kao (1995) also found Asian American students to have higher academic aspirations than their white counterparts and to overachieve and outperform their white counterparts in part to “offset the effects of perceived discrimination” (p. 151). Even Asian immigrant parents are inclined to adopt a narrow frame of achievement and success to better prepare and protect their children from the prejudice of being non-white (Louie, 2004). Indeed, these findings attest to the larger discussion that Asian Americans adopt “white” values to not only become industrious and successful but also to become more assimilated to the dominant culture and, ultimately, bypass discrimination.

Research has demonstrated how Asian Americans respond to the model minority stereotype by conforming to pervasive narrativized discourses around race (S. J. Lee et al., 2017; Cheng, 2013; Chhuon & Hudley, 2011). G. C. Park (2011) found that once the working-class Korean immigrant youth internalized that they would never be considered “real” Americans and achieve whiteness, they embraced the model minority identity which gave them honorary white status. They perceived the model minority identity as more desirable than other racialized narratives. Deviation from embracing the model minority identity is often sanctioned by the dominant group, as well as by members of one's ethnic group (G. Park, 2010). G. Park (2010) found Asian American youths policing members of their ethnic group to strengthen and upkeep their identity by “socially punishing those who did not live up to the stereotype” (G. C. Park, 2010, p. 626). Those who digressed from conforming and exhibiting the model minority behavior were seen as straying away from the American norm and, therefore, given foreigner status (L. Park, 2008). Therefore, Asian Americans are compelled to adopt narrow views of what constitutes academic success in a white-dominated society to counter the racialization of the people unwilling or unable to assimilate into the dominant white culture, as perpetual foreigners.

The Dangers of the Model Minority Stereotype

Yeh and Inose (2002) note that Asian American students experience greater fear of academic failure compared to their non-Asian peers. Students who fail to uphold the model minority status or cannot meet the expectation of the norm of success often feel like failures (J. Lee & Zhou, 2015; S. J. Lee, 2009; Louie, 2004). J. Lee and Zhou (2015) introduce the concept of the “achievement paradox” that comes into play when students do not fit into the cultural frame of the model minority and are most likely to feel like failures and outliers amongst their ethnic peers (J. Lee & Zhou, 2015). Asian students are often faced with a “stereotype threat”

(Steele, 1997), which they may then internalize through schooling practices that confirm the harmful stereotypes about them and their communities.

Considering that the model minority rhetoric is deeply interwoven with the ethnic-racial identities and cultures of Asian American communities, as well as among other racial groups, failure to attain the expected success has profound consequences. Stereotype threat to conform to the model minority status results in psychological distress such as depression or anxiety (Gupta et al., 2011). Failure to achieve academic success leads to a “loss of face” and may even cause them to distance themselves from their peers in school and their ethnic community (J. Lee & Zhou, 2015; Louie, 2004). Since high standards of achievement are directly linked to their ethnic identities, deviating from what constitutes success takes a toll on their own identities and sense of self-worth (Lew, 2004). Those who fail to conform to the model minority stereotype may even disassociate themselves from their more specific ethnic identities (i.e., Chinese or Japanese) and identify themselves more generally as Asian Americans (J. Lee & Zhou, 2015).

The model minority stereotype hinges on the idea that Asian Americans lack problems and are successful. Despite the common belief, the group continues to face prejudice and discrimination, which affects their self-esteem and psychological well-being. Sue et al. (2009) identified eight categories of microaggressions that Asian Americans collectively experience: a) alien in their own land, b) ascription of intelligence, c) exoticization of Asian women, d) invalidation of inter-ethnic differences, e) denial of racial reality, f) pathologizing cultural values/communication styles, g) second class citizenship, and h) invisibility. Furthermore, other studies have demonstrated that Asian American students experience a higher level of racial discrimination and harassment from their peers than other racial groups (Greene et al., 2006; Qin et al., 2008).

Asian American experience demonstrates how the model minority identity is simultaneously essential and counter-cultural to the existence of Asian Americans (C. H. Kim, 2009). Thus, the racialization of the Asian identity happens as the model minority “takes shape in contradictory forms of both resistance and assimilation under the rule of neoliberal multiculturalism” (C. H. Kim, 2009, pp. 52–53). Kibria (2000) demonstrates how Chinese and Korean Americans have accepted to “cultivate their Chinese and Korean membership and to downplay or minimize it” (p. 77) depending on various social terrains. Asian Americans are faced with having to constantly negotiate various sets of values and cultures. The adjustment and acculturation experiences of the Asian American immigrant youth compelled them to negotiate contrasting cultural value systems by shifting their identity across diverse contexts depending on the social circumstances. As the model minority stereotype complicates identity development of minoritized Korean American youths, they were found to shift their self-identity between “Koreanness” and “Americanness” as a coping strategy to deal with systematic racism and discrimination (Yeh et al., 2005).

Essentialism of Asian Americans

Despite the ubiquitous notion that Asian Americans are high achievers and highly educated, the monolithic cultural construction of Asian Americans overshadows the differences within the group. Lumping Asian Americans together as a model minority not only obfuscates and distorts the lived experiences of a diverse group but also silences and marginalizes those who fail to fit into the stereotype (S. J. Lee, 2009). For instance, the attributes of Asian Americans as having high educational attainment only pertains to certain subgroups, and therefore, if applied to the whole racialized group, it leaves behind people who do not or cannot fit into this stereotype (Chang, 2017). Although the model minority stereotype may seem

innocuous and harmless and play a role in creating the “stereotype promise” (J. Lee & Zhou, 2015, 2017), the stereotype causes Asian students to be perceived as successful and lacking problems, leading them to feel overlooked and invisible in school spaces (Coombs et al., 2014; Wing, 2007). Racialization and framings of Asian Americans ultimately become counter-cultural, as they render Asians invisible and their cultures as hidden and as something that would lack value and agency, capturing mirages of Asians as docile, reticent, and passive (Coombs et al., 2014). It also silences their needs, voices, and desires to be heard and acknowledged.

It is worth noting that the model minority stereotype not only silences the voices of both low- and high-achieving students (S. J. Lee, 2009) but also undermines student performance because academic success is deemed to be the expected norm for Asian students (Kao, 1995). The model minority discourse downplays the academic success of the individual and attributes it to the entire group instead. Furthermore, the dominant discourse contributes to the view that the academic success of Asian American students is the result of parental pressures and hard work, while the success of white students is due to innate intelligence. Asian Americans anticipate that their academic success will be judged on a higher standard because, again, their success is normalized and often considered less remarkable compared to their white counterparts.

Discrimination of Asian American students in schools commonly gets overshadowed by the group’s academic performance. The high level of school victimization among Asian Americans has been neglected at both institutional and policy levels. The literature reveals that Asian students’ need for academic and socio-emotional support (e.g., affirmative action, culturally responsive support, psychological help, and bilingual or disability services) often get neglected due to their ascribed model minority status (Cooc & Yang, 2017; Poon-McBrayer, 2011). The notion of Asian American exceptionalism often leads to the distorted perception that

Asian American students do not need or even qualify for disability services, which contributes to their underrepresentation (Cooc & Yang, 2017) in contrast to the significant overrepresentation of other racial minorities (e.g., Native Americans, Latinos, and Blacks) (Fujiura et al., 1998; Poon-McBrayer & García, 2000). For the struggling Asian youth, problems of language deficiency, retention, and lack of counseling services further their feelings of helplessness, alienation, and discrimination (Suh & Satcher, 2005).

Within the Asian population, there are differences in the bimodal distribution of education level and wealth which are often used to place them in a binary classification as either the “model minority” or the “oppressed minority” (Chang, 2017). In contrast to East Asian Americans’ status as the model minority due to their perceived educational success, S. J. Lee (2006) found Southeast Asian Americans’ experiences of racialization to be distinct from other Asian groups. Hmong American girls are seen as oppressed and in need of saving from traditional gender roles in Hmong culture (S. J. Lee, 2005, 2008). On the other hand, S. J. Lee (2005) found that the Hmong American boys were subjected to the process of “ideologically blackening” and were seen as dangerous and threatening when they associated themselves with Blacks. Since Hmong students do not fit neatly into the model minority stereotype, they are regarded as having closeness to Blackness. Here, the model minority rhetoric is again utilized to enable institutional and social actors to posit stereotypes of racial and ethnic groups along the color line.

The danger of the model minority stereotype is that it stems from simplified distinctive traits and ignores the markedly diverse historicity and experiences of diverse Asian American groups. The conceptualization of Asian Americans as a monolithic and pan-ethnic group neglects the diversity in diasporic histories, sociocultural and economic contributions, religious and

political affiliations, and cultural and linguistic practices (S. J. Lee & Kumashiro, 2005). The lumping of Asian Americans together marginalizes the rich experiential knowledge(s) of diverse communities, including their pains, frustrations, ingenuity, resilience, resistance, and aspirations. Furthermore, the essentialized cultural construction of race based on the normativity of whiteness impedes the efforts to develop a robust and nuanced understanding of how the intersection of multiple social markers (i.e., class, ethnicity, gender, religion, disability, and sexual orientations) generates Asian American youth's differential (dis)privileges and (dis)advantages in a racist, capitalist, ableist, and heterosexist society. As the Asian American population is anything but a monolith, the use of static racialized discourses to characterize this heterogeneous population becomes increasingly insufficient to address the disparity among groups that fall under the umbrella term of Asian American.

Anti-Blackness Inherent in the Model Minority Stereotype

The new frontier in the affirmative action debate has had the unfortunate consequence of pitting Asian Americans against Black Americans (C. J. Kim, 1999; Poon et al., 2019). It has been exacerbated by stereotypes of Asian Americans such as the model minority and the honorary whites. East and South Asians—henceforth, distinctively used with Asians and Asian Americans in this chapter because the terms aren't necessarily interchangeable with one another—are commonly portrayed as the model minority, a stereotype vastly regarded as harmless and conceivably even benign but problematic, nonetheless. Since, on average, the educational achievements of East and South Asian Americans are perceived as matching or even exceeding those of white counterparts, it is widely believed that Asian American communities no longer suffer discrimination and structural barriers (Bascara, 2006). The perceptions of Asians having relative privilege in the racial hierarchy and advantages over other marginalized

minorities dismiss their struggles with the experiences of discrimination and alienation.

Additionally, the stereotypes endemic to Asian Americans stem from the dominant belief that Asian success cannot be explained by racial inequality and the myth of a post-racial America (S. J. Lee, 2009). Although Asians' "relative privilege" does not necessarily lead to an equitable outcome for Asian Americans, the model minority stereotype ideologically situates Asian Americans in proximity to whiteness and legitimizes structural racism deeply woven in the U.S. society at the expense of *all* communities of color.

After immigrating to the U.S., Asian ethnic groups immediately encountered a society where whiteness is considered the norm and Blackness is viewed with a pathologizing gaze. From early on, Asian Americans learn to discern Blacks as the inferior and subordinate race and associate Blacks with racist prejudice and stereotypes. In reverse, animosity toward Asian Americans rises among non-Asian minorities because Asians are used as a tool to disconfirm systemic racism. The Asian American youth experiences racism from not only the dominant white group but also from other ethnic/racial minority groups. Chou and Feagin (2015) posit that racism faced by Asian Americans does not always come from the dominant group; other groups of color have accepted the framing of Asians as the model minority and honorary whites. In fact, the model minority rhetoric plays a role in forming racial hierarchies, intergroup relations, intragroup conflicts, and even intergroup and intragroup racism.

The model minority framework asserts that other minority groups should emulate the values instilled in East Asian American students. These implications have been perpetuated in school contexts and created a racial wedge between Asian Americans and African Americans. Research has found that, in schools, Asian Americans experience high levels of racial discrimination due to other groups' awareness of the model minority stereotype associated with

Asians (Yeh et al., 2005). A study found that Chinese American adolescents experience higher levels of harassment from their Black peers (Rivas-Drake et al., 2008). Although the model minority identity invited higher expectations from teachers, popular conceptions of Asian students accrued resentment and negative perceptions from not only white counterparts but also from their Black and Latinx peers (Rosenbloom & Way, 2004). In actuality, the model minority identity carries a negative connotation and stigma of being a “nerd” and “unpopular”, which makes it more difficult for Asian American students to build peer relationships (Qin et al., 2008). The model minority rhetoric has compelled even minoritized groups of color to accept such framings of Asians (Chou & Feagin, 2015).

The harmful portrayal of a common Asian American identity as the model minority is used as a tool to rationalize the meritocracy ideals that rely on comparing groups with each other, and the model minority stereotype sequentially pits Asians against Blacks. Therefore, meritocracy attaches great significance and value to the model minority stereotype, and as per the logic of meritocracy, those who are deemed as having merit and therefore deserving are destined to succeed. Meritocracy and the model minority stereotype work in tandem to reward those who are perceived as assiduous “model” minorities at the expense of Black communities. Hence, the fundamental logic of the model minority stereotype works as a mechanism to disavow anti-Blackness and a tool to create an oppositional relationship between Asians and Blacks. Chou and Feagin (2015) explain,

Antiblack images and attitudes are often carried by Asian, Latino, and other recent immigrants to the United States. They become the basis for negative attitudes toward and negative interactions with black Americans-from the first days of contact. From this experience, black Americans in their turn are likely to develop negative views of Asians and Latinos. Thus, the negative attitudes of Asian or Latino immigrants toward African Americans-and the negative attitudes of African Americans toward Asian or Latino Americans-are part of the much larger system of white-managed racism, which these groups had no role in initiating (p. 135).

To reiterate, the stereotypes of “model minority” and “honorary whites” ascribed to East and South Asian Americans are used as a racial wedge between whites and Blacks (S. J. Lee, 2009; Poon et al., 2016). Sexton (2010) takes it further to argue that Asian Americans are positioned at the confluence of white supremacy and anti-Blackness and are used as a racial wedge to bifurcate between Blacks and non-Blacks. Although Asian Americans continue to face discrimination, they are insulated and shielded from anti-Blackness and are also “immunized from Negrophobia” (C. J. Kim, 2018, p. 226). C. J. Kim (2018) posits,

...white supremacy has pushed them down, and anti-Blackness has provided the floor beneath which they cannot fall. Which is to say, even the worst-off Asians— those burdened by refugee status, lack of citizenship, poverty, language barriers, and more— enjoy the boon of being not Black in an anti-Black society” (p. 226).

Given Asians’ relative privilege and unique racial position, they are given the affordances to be indifferent toward anti-Blackness and, therefore, complicit in perpetuating and maintaining anti-Blackness. Asians are well aware of the cost of being Black in the U.S. society, and thus, distance themselves from Blackness. Asian Americans are taught and socialized to distinguish themselves from Blacks as a manifestation of anti-Blackness found in society (C. J. Kim, 2018).

Chae (2004) demonstrated how the youth saw the model minority stereotype threat as having overall adverse consequences on their schooling experiences, as they believed the model minority discourse to be harmful in that it homogenized Asian Americans and their diversity in terms of backgrounds and lived experiences. However, the model minority stereotype is difficult to resist, as it yields relative privilege as a vehicle that reinforces anti-Blackness. For example, the Korean American students in the study were aware of some of the “bargains” of being portrayed as a model minority, such as being able to be free from vigilance and unrestricted for minor misdemeanors, and “as long as teachers and administrators were going to believe in this

false image of Asian-origin youth, the participants were going to benefit as much as possible from it” (Chae, 2004, p. 68). The youth expressed their frustrations against the stereotype but were left feeling unable to challenge their teachers, who were the gatekeepers of their freedoms and opportunities at school. Along this line of research, what is to follow in this dissertation is the discussion around model minority stereotype by discussing the unique ways in which a group of Asian American youths negotiates both peer and adult culture as ascribed “model” minorities in an institutional system that reflects the middle and upper-middle-class culture and values. Additionally, this work highlights the importance of how intersectionality plays a key role in the racialization processes of Asian Americans.

The Perpetual Foreigner Stereotype

Asians have been excluded from conversations around binary racial discourses (e.g., white–Black binary) for long. Asian Americans have primarily dealt with racialization processes that are deeply rooted in the model minority and perpetual foreigner stereotypes pervasive in broader society. Within the model minority identity, Asian Americans are fundamentally subject to the perpetual foreigner label (J. Z. Park, 2008). Asian Americans have been generally acclaimed for their high academic achievements and strong entrepreneurial spirit but have never been considered “fully American” due to their perceived foreignness. Despite Asian Americans’ concerted efforts to adhere to the model minority stereotype, Asians have continuously found themselves in the roles of perpetual foreigners. Asian Americans have been historically interrogated with anti-Asian racism and colonial tropes that denigrate Asian Americans as “Orientals,” “yellow peril” (Okihiro, 1994), and “other” (Chang, 2017). Asians are paradoxically hyper-assimilated and yet are perpetually foreign. The promise of hyper-assimilation of Asians is contradictory; the need for an “erasure of difference” substantiates “further evidence of racial

distinctions” (J. Y. Kim, 2015, pp. 12–13). Throughout U.S. history, Asian Americans have always been considered foreign and have faced legal, sociopolitical, and socioeconomic discrimination, as well as subjected to differentiated treatment based on contemporary U.S.–Asian relations.

Schools have validated, essentialized, and stereotyped images of Asian Americans and successfully cast Asians as undesirable because they are unassimilable and, therefore, “less” or “un-American” as compared with their white counterparts. Endo (2012) explored how second-generation Japanese American youth saw school curricula on Asian American cultures, experiences, and histories as reinforcing “Orientalist stereotypes of the cultural exoticism-pathology binary. The school curricula depicted Asian/Americans as either exotic foreigners *or* the culturally problematic/strange (with nothing in between), or reproduced stereotypes of racial sameness” (Endo, 2012, p. 11). The cultural representation of Asian Americans stems from historical conceptualizations and framings of Asian Americans as “yellow peril” (Okiihiro, 1994), “the other,” “the Oriental,” and “enemy in war, categorizing Asians as a U.S. minority group (along with Blacks, Latina/os, and Native Americans)” (Chang, 2017, p. 8).

The Japanese American students in Endo's (2014) study recognized forming ethnic clubs at their school as compensating for what was lacking in the educational content, creating a counterspace where Asian Americans were affirmed, and their cultures were valued. However, students were far from seeing desirable outcomes by advocating for ethnocentric spaces. The need for these spaces was often discredited and even misinterpreted as “promoting racial divisiveness” (Endo, 2014, p. 108). Multicultural initiatives and ethnocentric spaces are devalued and, in many ways, used to uphold the racial hierarchy where white is seen as normal. Within the white–Black binary framework, Asian Americans are left out of the conversation about diversity.

Additionally, in Endo's (2014) study, even when Japanese Americans were considered through student-led clubs and international-themed events, school personnel and other students viewed them in objectifying and stereotypical ways.

Gilbert C. Park's (2011) study showed similar findings; white Americans who were seen as "cultureless" were positioned as normal and "authentic" Americans, which manifestly situated ethnic minority students as "cultured others" (p. 454). White Americans assumed the role of spectators at diversity-related events, which actively reinforced the concept of cultural differences as deviating from "American." This dominant paradigm shaped how Korean Americans understood Americanness as being white and fluent in English and how they saw their position as inferior to whites, as the construction of the "American" label "did not allow the Korean immigrant students to see unhyphenated authentic American label as an option for them" (G. C. Park, 2011, p. 461). Once again, the established racial differences reinforced Korean American students' identities as perpetual foreigners within the school. Perpetual foreigner stereotype steers Asianness and Americanness to be in contradiction to one another and hinders one to be a true "Asian American" in the way L. Park (2008) suggests: "to be Asian American is to belong to a third culture...a combination of both Asian values and American values" (p. 554).

Similarly, Palmer and Jang (2005) reported that American-born Korean Americans distanced themselves from the Korean-born because of their perceived foreignness. Racial tensions and power relations rooted in racism are found between Korean-born Korean American (KBKA) students and American-born Korean American (ABKA) students (Palmer & Jang, 2005). Whiteness is fixed as the norm, and ABKA students disapproved of the "Koreanness" of KBKA students, which reinforced the popular discourse of Asians as perpetual foreigners. U.S.-born Korean Americans distanced themselves from KBKA students to gain acceptance from

their white peers (Palmer, 2007). Even though neither group could gain full acceptance from their white peers, the recent immigrant youth felt they were superior to the American-born Korean American youth because of their strong ethnic ties, and, in return, the American-born youth criticized the Korean-born youth for their failure to adopt the dominant ways of life (Palmer, 2007; Palmer & Jang, 2005). Both groups view each other through the lens of fixed categories of racialization and cultural assimilation. Another example is that of Chinese American youths. For example, it is common for Chinese youth to experience harassment and tension among different groups of Chinese students in school contexts (Qin et al., 2008). Verbal harassment is the more common form of within-group discrimination, and some of the causes of these patterns are immigration status, English accent and limited language proficiency, educational achievement, and physical size, among other factors (Qin et al., 2008; Rosenbloom & Way, 2004).

Overall, the dominant portrayal of Asian Americans as perpetual foreigners and those as departing away from the American norm was the key factor in their experiences of discrimination and harassment inflicted by their non-Asian peers (Rosenbloom & Way, 2004; Qin et al., 2008). Moreover, Asian American youth is more likely to become victims of race- or ethnicity-related hate speech (Cooc & Gee, 2014). Asian students experience both overt forms of discrimination such as physical and verbal harassment, as well as covert forms of discrimination such as stereotypes and microaggressions (Fisher et al., 2000). Cooc and Gee (2014) found that peer discrimination and harassment in the form of hate speech were also geared toward Asian males due to their physical size and perceived weakness. These experiences take serious psychological tolls, including depression, low self-esteem (Greene et al., 2006), and stress (Grossman & Liang, 2008).

The corrosive health effects of the perpetual foreigner status are clear. It erodes the emotional and psychological wellness of the Asian American youth by trapping them into simplistic and flattened portrayals. Cho et al. (2003) indicated that approximately one in five Korean American youth struggled with negative schooling experiences that solidified their status as foreigners and outsiders. Yoon and Haag (2010) research showed that regardless of students' nativity and longevity of living in the U.S., both groups of 1.5- and second-generation students shared a common experience of being treated as foreigners and outsiders. Schools continue to reproduce and perpetuate the racial hierarchy that exists in the larger society and teach dominant ideologies through formal and hidden curricula that intensify the unequal social structures along chromatic lines. The complex narratives around how youths make sense of the perpetual foreigner stereotype that follow in chapter five linger around prior literature presented thus far. Moreover, the stories of Asian youths in this dissertation evolve around the ever-present racism and recent turn of events that fueled the violence against Asian American community through the COVID-19 pandemic (Lam et al., 2021). This dissertation is dedicated to the expansion of the contemporary experiences of exclusion and segregation of Asian American youths in U.S. schooling.

Conceptual Framework

Asian Critical Theory (Asian Crit)

As a sub-discipline of the Critical Race Theory (CRT), Asian Critical Theory (AsianCrit) (Museus & Iftikar, 2014; Iftikar & Museus, 2018) emerged to centralize the racialization of people of Asian descent and the role of white supremacy in shaping the schooling experiences of Asian Americans in the U.S. Although CRT has been a robust tool in centering race in the analyses of how education subjugates people of color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017), there is a

need for group-specific critical framework grounded in complex historicity, collective experiences, and specific issues that are unique to non-Black communities of color. AsianCrit aims to (re)center the voices of Asian Americans in education discourse to address racial oppression and invisibility (Takaki, 1998; Tamura, 2001, 2003; Umemoto, 1989). The following section is dedicated to discussing the seven main tenets of AsianCrit. Iftikar and Museus (2018) have designed a racially conscious framework that can be used to analyze the range of racialized experiences and positionalities of East and South Asian American youth, further discussed in the subsequent chapters.

Asianization

AsianCrit embraces the principle that race is a socially constructed phenomenon (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017) constantly shaped and reshaped by economic, political, social, and cultural forces. Racial categories are not based on biological traits that could be used to define and categorize people of color, however race continues to be critical in the way the U.S. society is formed (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Systemic racism and racialization through which people of color acquire minority status are endemic to the U.S. social fabric that reinforces the larger systems of white supremacy (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Iftikar & Museus, 2018). Systemic and structural racism and racial oppression play a critical role in shaping Asian American youth's racial realities (S. J. Lee, 2006). Asian Americans are racialized as model minorities and perpetual foreigners, which are statuses pervasive in academic spaces, functioning as tools of dehumanization and exclusion from racial discourse (e.g., white–Black binary). Differential racialization of Asian Americans is both manifestation and maintenance of the reinforcement of existing racial codification and stratification in U.S. society. Indeed, AsianCrit works on the premise that essentialized constructions of Asian American communities have been

exploited to drive laws, policies, practices, and perspectives, which not only marginalizes Asian Americans but also facilitates racial divisiveness among marginalized populations (Curammeng et al., 2017).

Transnational Contexts

While AsianCrit problematizes the perpetual foreigner trope, the theory also calls for the acknowledgment of diasporic and transnational experiences of the Asian communities (Curammeng et al., 2017). Considering the transnational contexts through the AsianCrit framework provides an opportunity to demonstrate the “ethnic and immigrant differences among APA [Asian Pacific Americans] student experiences” (Teranishi, 2002, p. 146). This tenet of the framework problematizes dominant notions of race by examining ethnicity and immigration among the Asian American population (Teranishi, 2002).

(Re)constructive history

AsianCrit centers on the voices of Asian communities and highlights the “importance of critically historicizing the racialized experiences of Asian Americans” (Curammeng et al., 2017, p. 2). Therefore, AsianCrit pushes back on ahistoricism (Teranishi, 2002) and values engagement in the critical process of (re)constructing a collective historical narrative to incorporate the perspectives and contributions of Asian Americans in the U.S. This tenet focuses on including the historicity of Asian Americans that was made invisible by white-centric history and education. As such, (re)constructing history is at the forefront in the efforts to resist practices of erasure and exclusion through the historicization of race and Asian American communities.

Strategic (Anti)essentialism

The conceptualization of Asian Americans as a monolithic group neglects the diversity in diasporic histories, religious and political affiliations, and cultural and linguistic practices of this

population, as well as marginalizes the rich experiential knowledge(s) of including their pains, frustration, ingenuity, resilience, resistance, and aspirations. It interrogates how essentialized racial discourse corrodes the multiplicity of identities and complexity of historicity and lived experiences of Asian Americans. This tenet recognizes that the diverse groups within Asian communities are racialized in complex and varied ways, but it “emphasizes that Asian Americans can and do actively intervene in the racialization process” (Iftikar & Museus, 2018, p. 940).

Intersectionality

This tenet emphasizes how white supremacy and various systems of inequality shape “intersecting” identities that result in unique experiences of discrimination and oppression of Asian Americans. Under the pan-ethnic inclusive grouping of Asian Americans, an essentialized sociocultural construction of a racial group and subsequent educational ideologies and practices impedes efforts to develop a sophisticated understanding of how the intersection of multiple social markers (e.g., class, gender, religion, disability, and sexual orientations) generate Asian Americans’ differential privileges and risks in a racist, capitalist, ableist, and heterosexist society.

Story, Theory, and Praxis

To counteract the detrimental damage of racism, there is a need for centering and valuing the voices of Asian communities to challenge the inner workings of white supremacy and generate counterstories against oppressive dominant narratives. Storytelling emphasizes joint, collaborative social justice praxis to reclaim stories and re-construct the uni-disciplinary focus of historical experiences (Teranishi, 2002) to (re)imagine the future. Centering the experiences of Asian Americans is to disrupt invisibility and voicelessness, counteract the racial reductionism

that Asian American communities encounter in everyday practices, and re-center future-oriented new narratives filled with a transformative agency, political solidarity, collective identities, and commitment to equity-oriented resistance.

Commitment to Social Justice

Lastly, as the various strands of Critical Race Theory (e.g., LatCrit and TribalCrit) are founded upon the common goal of social justice, AsianCrit, too, is established to offer a critical lens through which to examine power imbalances and resist white supremacy in all forms (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). AsianCrit follows the tradition of the Critical Race Theory that allowed me to see how the intersections of race, gender, and class of Asian American youths become the backdrop of the ways they navigate the pervasive discourses such as the model minority and perpetual foreigner stereotypes. AsianCrit posts challenges to dominant assumptions and highlights the complex narratives and lived experiences of those who have been racialized through seemingly race-neutral structures and institutions that are in fact constructed by white supremacy (Roithmayr, 1999). AsianCrit seeks to remain responsive to Asian communities and those who are committed to the struggle in bringing about praxis and justice.

Dissertation Roadmap

Although the existing body of literature on the lived experiences of the East and South Asian American youth in school systems has succeeded in foregrounding the impact of racial stereotypes on their academic, socio-emotional, and behavioral outcomes, the way the Asian youth make sense of race and racialization that they experience has not been explored as much. When it comes to prior literature which focuses on the racialization of Asian American students, much of the significant work has focused on Southeast Asians. Though Warikoo (2022) focuses on middle- and upper-middle-class Asian American communities in a predominantly white

school and J. Lee & Zhou (2015) discuss the success frame of the growing Asian population in the U.S., the contribution of my dissertation work discusses an area that is yet to be explored more in-depth. Therefore, my critical ethnography research which focuses on the diverse experiences of middle- and upper-middle-class East and South Asian American youth in a suburban Midwestern high school, extend the discussions around how they interpret, negotiate, and resist the “racial and cultural demands of identity development” (Ng et al., 2007, p. 120) and schooling.

In this first chapter, I introduced the study and its significance. This chapter explored the prior literature around the racialization of East and South Asian Americans and how they shape the schooling experiences of young Asians. This chapter focused on the model minority stereotype which has been used as a tool of white supremacy to injure not only Asian but all minoritized groups. It also discussed how Asian American communities have historically been and continue to be identified as perpetual foreigners.

Chapter 2 presents the study design and methodologies used to conduct data collection and analysis. The methodologies used comprise participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and the collection of ethnographic artifacts. Researcher positionality is also considered to disclose the intersectional identities that influenced my orientations and perspectives in the field. The context in which the research school site, Redstone High School, is located is also illustrated in this chapter.

Chapter 3 foregrounds the racial/ethnic differences in experiencing schooling policies and practices and the conditions that shape the navigation of school spaces by the youth. The chapter discusses how students at Redstone High School are segregated by testing and accountability policies, disciplinary and surveillance practices, and academic tracking. From disciplining

policies to segregation of students along color lines, all have made it abundantly clear that Black and Brown students are placed at the lowest rung of the racial hierarchy, while white students are placed at the very top. Asian Americans are fluidly positioned in between, which gives the group an illusion that they have relative privilege because they benefit from blissful ignorance about issues of racial inequity. The Asian American youth have learned to perceive that they are in a position of “privilege” compared to that of other communities of color, which leads to their complacency, sense of entitlement, and beliefs that support the status quo.

Chapter 4 explicates how, despite the prevalent understanding of Asian Americans having relative privilege compared to other minority groups, the participants’ unique racial positions in an anti-Asian society have steered them to embody the roles of a model minority to mitigate distinctive discrimination and structural barriers against them. Although data show that students suffer from psychological distress, anxiety, and a sense of low self-esteem that stem from their ascribed model minority status, they witness how such racial stereotype typically works in their favor. Such a perspective leads them to effortlessly navigate and work through the U.S. education system. In fact, many have internalized the stereotype because they have come to see how the model minority stereotype is still ubiquitously believed to hold true. Therefore, many students struggle to resist conforming to such stereotypes and to recognize and name racism. Additionally, data demonstrate how students and their families’ middle-class status and private interests in social mobility make it difficult for them to reject the model minority discourse, as well as the prevailing logic of meritocracy fueled by neoliberal forces pervasive in schools.

Chapter 5 contributes to the understanding of the racialization of youths as perpetual foreigners and how the youth perceive the unique discriminations they face as racial beings. The

East and South Asian participants were given the status of “honorary white,” but they were never accepted as fully equal to their white counterparts despite the social acceptance of their work ethic and academic achievement. This chapter also informs the educational outcomes of the unjust portrayal of the youth from Asian communities as perpetual foreigners and the antithesis of being American.

Chapter 6 outlines how students and staff at Redstone High School were troubled by the lack of appropriate interventions to address various inequities and traumas that students are faced with. They projected their desire that the school be willing to stimulate critical open discussions around race and racism. They also expressed a demand for race-conscious culture learning and counseling.

Chapter 7 concludes the study with future implications and research recommendations that could potentially be addressed by educational researchers and practitioners pursuing social justice in educational policy and practice. I discuss the affordances of doing participatory action projects with various actors, including the youth, educators, and school leaders, because of the great potentiality in encouraging criticality, praxis, reflexivity, and transformative agency toward social justice.

Chapter Two: Methodology and Research Context

Chapter two offers a rationale for the methodology used in this critical ethnography, which reveals how asymmetrical relations of power in the schooling system are reproduced and perpetuated through the process of the racialization of the youth of color, specifically East and South Asian American youths. Additionally, critical ethnographic methods are employed to examine how East and South Asian American students make sense of dominant racial discourses and construct and negotiate their hybrid identities through their navigation of the culturally mediated system of schooling.

Critical Ethnography

Ethnography “seeks to understand life as it is lived” and “emphasizes the utility of personal experiences—the experiences of both the people being studied and the people doing the study” (Duneier et al., 2014, p. 2). Furthermore, critical ethnography is dialectic, as both social structures and practices of human actors are concurrently considered (Anderson, 1989). Critical ethnographers attempt to convey ideologies, symbols, representations, and cultural tools embedded in sites of human activities through seemingly neutral ways and the autonomy of human agency, which is used to interpret, make meaning, and evolve such power apparatuses (Willis & Trondman, 2002). Critical ethnographies are committed to examining and revealing power relationships that are discursive in the lives of people and embedded within the larger sociopolitical structures of privilege and repression. The narrativized roles, ranging from teachers and students to disciplinary expectations and the notions of achievement and smartness, compose a significant interpretative backdrop for critical ethnographers to decipher and explicate how the imbalance of power and control is created and maintained. Moreover, the dissertation study utilizes “critical bifocality” (Weis & Fine, 2012), which is a “theory of method” (p. 174)

that helps to render visible the day-to-day practices intertwined with the broader structures of power. This lens complements the critical ethnographic methods to illustrate the vital interactions between individuals and arrangements of power in various structures found in society writ large (McDermott & Raley, 2011).

Every day, young people navigate and learn within and across multiple social settings such as homes, schools, and communities, to name a few. Scholars have posited that learning is embodied by and through “movement” across multiple spaces (Gutiérrez, 2008; Vossoughi & Gutiérrez, 2014); further, learning is assumed to occur through intercultural and interpersonal exchanges embedded in meaningful activities within a range of environments, including in-school and out-of-school settings that youth find themselves in. Decontextualized approaches restrain the development of a sophisticated and nuanced understanding of how youths build on and internalize multiple ideological, cognitive, behavioral, and affective tools as they traverse through boundary-crossing movements within/across interacting activity systems (Engeström, 2016; Engeström & Sannino, 2010; Gutiérrez, 2016; Vossoughi & Gutiérrez, 2014). Therefore, critical ethnography pays attention to the context in which minoritized people are situated. It is used to delineate the hybrid, intercultural movements, and interactions across contexts that shape identity and positionality development as accounting for how the learning of youths takes place through “multi-sited sensibility” (Vossoughi & Gutiérrez, 2014).

Youth of color are constantly engaged in practices of cultural communities where they learn, modify, and utilize various “funds of knowledge” (Moll et al., 1992) that they already possess. In this context, critical ethnography emphasizes the cultural nature of human learning and development and the historicized understanding of youth’s everyday repertoires of practice (Rogoff & Gutiérrez, 2003). As such, the methodological approaches used in this project focused

on the complex interplay between the human mind and the sociocultural activities individuals engage with to analyze how humans culturally learn (Cole, 1996; Engeström, 2016; Pacheco, 2012; Vygotsky, 1978). The study is grounded in an interpretive perspective that focuses on students' educational experiences as an aggregation of socially constructed and locally generated experiences. This study utilizes critical ethnography methods to better understand the “holistic cultural portrait” (Creswell, 2013, p. 96) and the collective nature of experiences of people within communities.

Identity forming and self-making, mediated by naturalized narratives in social worlds, are deeply connected to how individuals are positioned in society. Students construct identities through their everyday repertoires, which are grounded in sociocultural contexts. Therefore, identity operates as a window to examine how discursive practices shape the ways in which people “perform” in society. Critical ethnography has been used in this research to explore the question of how youths from varying racial/ethnic backgrounds shape their educational experiences as an “anthropological question to be understood through people’s actions and practices” (Irving, 2009, p. 295). As such, critical ethnography considers an extended unit of analysis to overcome the problematic rigid construction of culture and binary of the reductionist view of youths’ culturally learning and developing identities (González, 2004). Critical ethnography, as an analytic tool, focuses on how individuals correspond and “own” identities vis-à-vis discourses and interactions (Gee, 2000). It offers opportunities to identify the minoritized as bearers and producers of knowledge.

Data Collection and Analysis

The critical ethnography included eight months of participant observation and semi-structured interviews with Chinese, Indian, and Korean American students, as well as teachers,

parents, and community members, in addition to a collection of artifacts. I conducted over 500 hours of participant observations at Redstone High School, a public high school in a Midwestern city, for four to five full days per week and the entire duration of the school year (2019–2020) before the school closure in March, which occurred due to the coronavirus outbreak in 2020. I used ethnographic research methods as they allowed me to seriously consider the local conditions that inform the multifaceted Asian experience and understanding of race and the processes of racialization. Further, I conducted participant observations in community spaces such as the Korean Presbyterian church several times a month and the Chinese Language school a few times per semester over the course of the study to better account for the complexity of youths' experiences across multiple social contexts beyond the walls of the school.

My guiding questions are as follows:

- 1) How do educational experiences of East and South Asian American youths shape their understandings of race, including their racial identities and positionings?
 - a. How do their understandings of race intersect their understandings of privilege and whiteness?
- 2) What roles do educational policies and practices play in shaping, reflecting, and perpetuating the dominant racializing narratives?
 - a. How do stereotypes of Asian Americans as model minorities and perpetual foreigners shape the ways in which youths construct, negotiate, and even resist their racial identities and positionings?

Research Site and Sampling

I immersed myself in a predominantly white public high school in a suburban area of a Midwestern city, which I refer to as Redstone High School. Through purposeful sampling, I have

selected a public high school in a school district similar to other districts across the nation due to the increase in racial and ethnic diversity, owing to significant demographic shifts from an influx of immigrant population and communities of color (Parker et al., 2018). I specifically considered Redstone High, located in an affluent and predominantly white yet racially diverse school district in the state, due to the recent increase in East and South Asian American students who have been attending the school. Access to the school allowed me to examine how daily interactions and everyday practices that emerge from racialized neoliberal discourses and practices shape the ways in which East and South Asian American youths make sense of race and their experiences as racial in-betweeners in educational spaces.

Moreover, to develop a comprehensive understanding of Chinese, Indian, and Korean American participants' schooling experiences, I used the snowball and purposeful sampling method (Creswell, 2007). I attempted to recruit participants who represent the Asian students attending Redstone High. I also chose Chinese, Indian, and Korean Americans since, in the broader category of Asians, they are often identified as high-achieving “smart” Asians—the model minorities. Out of approximately 32 students with whom I had close contact, I shadowed 19 focal participants (5 Chinese, 7 Indian, and 7 Korean American students) (see Appendix B), who were primarily from middle-class backgrounds with parents with collegiate or advanced degrees and are in managerial and professional occupations in the government, education, banking, and technology sectors. I also recruited 39 schoolteachers and staff who worked closely with my study participants and the students of color at the school for data collection.

Participant Observation

I used ethnographic method practices to explore and understand the social worlds of East and South Asian American youths, which are established and sustained through interactions with

others in the school ecology. As participant observations are typically undertaken over an extended period so that researchers may obtain detailed accounts that include obscure details about individuals, communities, and/or the population under study, I completed participant observation and took fieldnotes after observing or experiencing events that stood out to me or were considered as relevant data. I made my research data accessible by writing daily fieldnotes and journals while in the field.

Through participant observation, I could discern the discrepancies between what is often believed should happen (institutional policies and practices) and what actually happens in the school spaces. The participant observation conducted within school spaces included the observations of the focal and general participants during structured periods of time (e.g., class lecture, individual and group work) as well as interactions with the students during unstructured periods of time (e.g., lunchtime, passing periods, advisory periods, free choice activities, and after-school activities). I scanned for events and activities that involved teacher-student interactions, peer interactions, and interactions between or among administrators, staff, and teachers. Additionally, I employed participant observation strategies to observe the intra-group and inter-group interactions of East and South Asian American youths. I specifically searched for interactions that signified racialized narratives, stereotypes, racial discrimination, and institutional or pedagogical practices that characterize the potential to produce or maintain racial hierarchy and inequitable opportunities at Redstone High School (McDermott & Raley, 2011; Pollock, 2004). As part of self-reflexivity and self-examination practices (Willis & Trondman, 2002), I considered the possibility of confirmation bias in my engagements during participant observation. Throughout my reflection, I acknowledged and recorded my inclination to

constantly focus or anticipate the turn of events that may be utilized as data to question my preexisting assumptions and beliefs.

Semi-structured Interviews

The axiological approach in the semi-structured interview component of the critical ethnography attempted to rescind the established forms of power hierarchy between those who are traditionally viewed to possess knowledge (i.e., the researchers) and those who are studied and researched (i.e., the students from nondominant communities) in research, especially given ethnography's history rooted in colonialism and imperialism (Allweiss, 2015; Smith, 1999; Villenas, 1996). For example, the current research intends to explore how the positionalities and understandings of race are formed and how they are changed or maintained over time by incorporating the youths' ontological and epistemological perceptions construed with their own voices. The semi-structured interview processes encouraged participants to bring in their ontological and epistemological sensibilities and experiential knowledge to position them as "experts" on their own lives and experiences (Baldwin, 2012). The epistemological relativism of participants' understanding of their identity and positionality that mediates imagined futures was theorized as "a social phenomenon, constituted in the experienced, lived-in world" (Lave, 1993, p. 64).

Until the school closure in March 2020, I conducted semi-structured interviews using an interview protocol (see Appendix C) to ensure consistency across all interviews. Out of 38 semi-structured interviews, 23 were conducted with East and South Asian American youths, of whom seven were Chinese Americans, nine were Indian Americans, five were Korean Americans, and one was white. To better discern the contradictions that emerge from the youths' interactions within their social contexts, I employed 15 semi-structured interviews with five parents, four

teachers, and six staff members. While I interviewed the youths' parents, I did not draw on this data in the dissertation. All participants in this study were given pseudonyms to ensure anonymity.

Ethnographic Artifacts

The ever-evolving cultural artifacts existing in institutional systems, such as assignments, homework, worksheets, standardized test scores, tracking system (e.g., college prep, honor/advanced placement courses), and labels (e.g., English language learner, lackluster, and disruptive) constitute normalized, naturalized stories of academic achievement and behavioral functioning. Cultural artifacts and “culture-making resources” (Anderson-Levitt, 2012) utilized in schooling mediate accessibility to resources, interactional modes, and everyday pedagogical practices that students use to make sense of themselves. This critical ethnography considered the cultural artifacts that mediate “acts of inclusion/exclusion, of allowing/compelling only certain people to evince the sign that maintains positions and the value of artifacts as indices of position” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 135). As such, gathering ethnographic artifacts included the cultural product and materials shared across the Redstone High School community. I conducted document analysis of site documents, which included school flyers, newsletters, daily announcements, class handouts, students' writing and work, as well as news articles and videoclips from local media sources.

Data Analysis

To make analytic sense of the dataset comprised of interview transcripts, participant observation fieldnotes, and document analysis, a methodologically appropriate coding procedure was employed, introduced by the constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014). The process consists of three steps; during the initial coding process, a line-by-line coding procedure was

carried out using process coding, in vivo coding, and emotion coding strategies. To enhance the validity of the investigation, the analytic and reflective personal jottings were regarded in the analysis of emerging codes, categories, themes, theoretical insights, preconceived biases, and assumptions of the investigator, which influence the validity of the research (Saldaña, 2013). I completed the transcription and inductive coding of transcripts, fieldnotes, artifacts, personal jottings, and student work during the phase of data analysis. Lastly, all observation fieldnotes, transcriptions and translations of interviews are my own work.

Researcher Positionality

The positionality of the researcher in societal hierarchies and contexts informs the framework aimed at examining how systematic racism and inequality are understood and experienced in complex ways based on the identities, social positions, and the general outlook of individuals. Ethnographers are trained to view themselves as research tools that inform their ethnographic work. Thus, as an ethnographer, I constantly prompted myself to reflect upon how my position and various intersecting identities shaped my interactions with the research participants and understanding of the research data.

As a U.S.-born first-generation Korean immigrant, I was once complicit in reinforcing the model minority myth myself, internalizing and embodying similar stereotypes to portray how I believed I should have been. Such compliance helped me in navigating the hostile environment of the dominant cultures in the educational system and society at large as a protective response to racism in the U.S. Although I was also perceived as a perpetual foreigner, I believed that the “positive” model minority stereotype would compensate for the same. Yet, from my experiences of working with youth of color at a no-excuse charter school in New York City as a Tutor Corps

Urban Education fellow and Special Education Teacher Assistant before joining the UW-Madison, I realized how my acquiescence came at the expense of all communities of color.

This research study has been largely shaped by my experiences of teaching the youth of color with/without disabilities at the aforementioned charter school. While the school population consisted primarily of African Americans, Latinx, and Chinese Americans, racial hierarchies persisted in the curriculum, although hidden at varying instances. If the model minority stereotype constructed Asian American students as docile bodies, it would also label Black and Brown students as “troubled” bodies. For all the absence of white bodies, they remained the composition of the idealized norm. Despite my relative racial privilege and authority as an Asian American teacher, there was little I could do to dismantle the invisible yet ever-present shadow of white dominance and racial injustice. The prolonged frustration, helplessness, and guilt I experienced were also formative: I have been driven to understand how policies and practices may transform normative schooling practices, which produce and perpetuate institutional inequities into culturally enriching forms of learning that privilege racial equity and inclusion. My teaching and research have worked toward writing against culture of domination ever since (Abu-Lughod, 1991).

Moreover, as a U.S.-born Korean immigrant, my commitment to giving back to my community motivated me to engage with the Korean American communities during my doctoral studies at UW-Madison. I taught Korean to second- and third-generation Korean American students at a local Korean language church that was operated by the local Korean Presbyterian church, of which I am a member. In my capacity as a youth group director at the local Korean community church, I continued to mentor and advise Korean American youths. Most of the youths I served attended middle and high schools of the school district that Redstone High

School was part of. With my weekly interactions and relationships with Korean youths, I envisioned conducting a pilot study with Chinese, Indian, and Korean American youths at Redstone High. I was introduced to three senior students, one Korean American male student, one Chinese American male student, and one Indian American female student by one of the Korean American students I closely interacted with every week at the co-ethnic church. I planned the pilot study as a youth participatory action research. The Asian youths from Redstone High participated due to their interest in using research to study the racial stereotypes against Asian Americans in their school. They contributed their own schooling experiences and tensions encountered at Redstone High, approaching the research with an insider perspective, which is immersed in the day-to-day culture of the school.

The team collaborated to develop research questions and focus on methods and research practices appropriate for data collection. I trained the research team on ethnographic methodologies such as participant observations and semi-structured interviews to collect data on institutional practices that contribute to how the youth of color experience marginalization and racial discrimination in their daily lives as students at Redstone High School. Participant observations were recorded in the form of fieldnotes. Each researcher conducted one-on-one semi-structured interviews with one or two fellow classmates. The research team met twice to interpret the data collected as well as share their positionalities and personal experiences with varying aspects of the research process. Through group discussion and reflection, student researchers were able to critically delineate racialized narratives that were pervasive in institutional practices. Ultimately, they discussed the future implications and directions that may initiate interventions to foster equity and community well-being at their school.

The pilot study helped me remain informed of the school context and the student population, thereby steering me to select the school as the research site for my dissertation study. It also provided me with insights into the educational experiences of East and South Asian American youths through inductive reasoning with the data collected from the youths, which, in turn, allowed me to design the dissertation appropriately. The pilot study also equipped me with potential contacts for participant recruitment and opportunity to conduct “relationship-centered research” (Allweiss, 2015).

Insider-Outsider Perspective

When I first began my fieldwork at Redstone High in August of 2019, I had high hopes of meeting a fair number of East and South Asian students as soon as I immersed myself into the school setting. I expected to witness co-ethnic groups and pockets of Asians at every grade level throughout the campus. I was confident that Asian students would welcome me and treat me as one of their own. I speculated that it would be relatively easy to recruit participants, but it only took less than a full day to realize that the reality was at odds with my idealistic expectations. I started out in my fieldwork feeling like an outsider and foreseeing challenging tasks ahead (e.g., recruiting participants, asking teachers for permission to observe their classes, shadowing students everywhere they went, constantly asking for favors, and building rapport with people). As an outsider and a person of color, I felt rather despondent and isolated in most of the spaces at the school. Everywhere I went, I was the sole researcher and often felt awkward both in my role and in relation to others. While my presence was quite obvious in some spaces, it lacked in others. Even as an adult and an affiliate of the university, I had experienced racism and discrimination (e.g., intimidating me with a slant-eye pose and white power hand signal); hence, in these spaces as well, I was subdued by the powerful forces of white supremacy. I witnessed

and experienced several incidents throughout my fieldwork that made me feel emotionally distraught, which tends to be natural in the stressful and emotional labor involved in fieldwork (Jackson, 2010). I started my fieldwork expecting it to be both intriguing and endearing, experiencing high school in the U.S. for the first time (having only attended international high schools in South Korea and teaching urban students in middle school) and yet, I ended up engaging in first-hand experiences alongside my study participants. I was also able to sense and witness the emotional and bodily responses of my participants and pay attention to my own subjectivity, emotions, and feelings that guided the data collection and analysis. Emotions, as preconscious and unconscious reactions, were not only valuable sources of insight but encouraged further objectivity (Devereux, 1967).

Research Context

Midwest School District

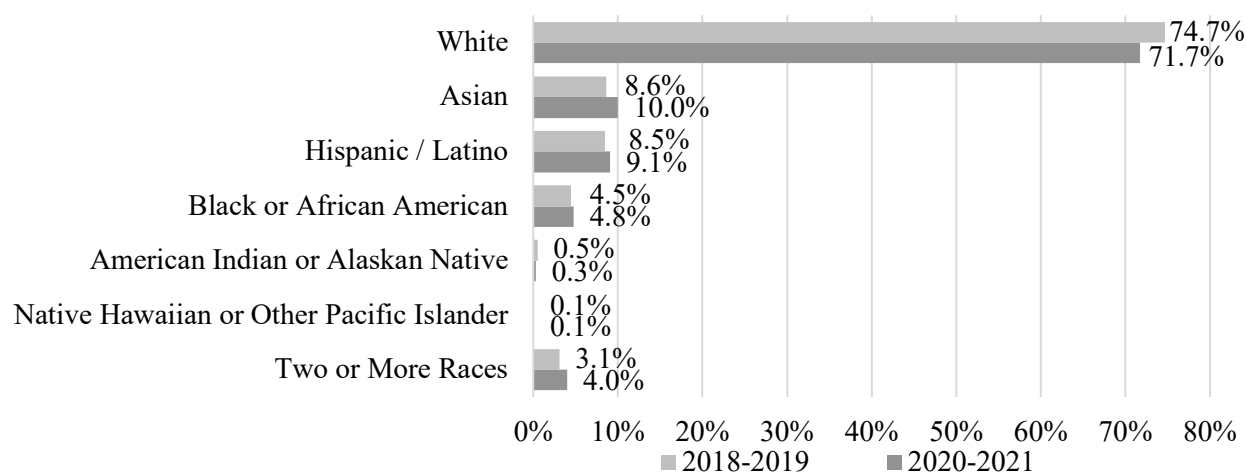
Redstone High School is ranked as one of the top-performing high schools in the state and is particularly well-known for being in an affluent school district—the Midwest School District, which is situated in the suburb of a mid-sized metropolitan city, where the population is roughly 20,000. Redstone High School is the only high school in the school district that consists of eight 4K and elementary schools, two middle schools, one high school, and one alternative community school. The school districts' accountability report card for the year 2019-2020 was unpublished; however, according to the public report for 2020-2021, students with disabilities made up 10.5% of the student population, English learners were 5.2%, and students receiving free or reduced lunch consisted of 19% (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2021). According to censusreproter.org, the income per capita of the school district was \$54,786, more than 1.5 times the amount in the state (\$33,375), while the median household income was

\$87,209, about 1.4 times the amount in the state (\$61,747). Persons living below the poverty line composed 4.2%, about two-fifths of the rate in the state (11.3%). The median value of owner-occupied housing units was \$375,300, more than double the amount in the state (\$180,600). Lastly, those with a bachelor's degree or higher composed 60% of the total population, which is double the rate in the state (30.1%).

Introduction to Redstone High School

Figure 1: Redstone High School Demographics of 2018-2019 and 2020-2021

Retrieved from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (2021) website.



Based on the accountability report card produced by the state's Department of Public Instruction, in the 2020-2021 school year, whites consisted of 72%, Asians consisted of 10%, Latinx consisted of 9%, and Blacks consisted of 5% of the total student population. Compared to the demographic data from the school year 2018-2019, there was a noticeable increase in the number of Asians (8.6% to 10%), Latinx (8.5% to 9.1%), Blacks (4.5% to 4.8%), and mixed-race students (3.1% to 4.0%), whereas the enrollment of whites decreased (74.7% to 71.7%) in 2019-2020. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, Asians consisted 10% of the

total student population in 2019-2020. The total enrollment of students also increased from 2,157 in the year 2018-2019 to 2,301 in 2020-2021.

Although the school was located in a school district that is among 1% of those with the most diverse schools in the state, Redstone High was still considered an all-white institution by many. The overall image of the school appeared to be that of a “rich white” school. One of the Chinese American female students in the study, Sunny Peng, spoke of how Redstone High was widely perceived by the surrounding schools and communities.

Sometimes I would hear from other people from other school districts, and they would just say that Redstone is like a wealthy school and like not to be racist or anything, but it's more like a majority of white students and everyone here is competitive and stuff.

In the first week of my fieldwork, a math teacher I knew from a different research project offered me a tour of the school campus. I was surprised to hear about the plan to demolish and remodel the humanities side of the school, which was soon to extend an already large school building. The parking lot near the performing arts center was going to turn into a new building as well. The school was well-resourced, with every classroom equipped with the newest technologies and supplies. The school also had a full gym, indoor basketball court, football field, baseball field, community pool, and a tennis court. During the school tour, the teacher mentioned how the school was one of the largest and wealthiest in the state.

Students in the study often mentioned that their families were drawn to Redstone High owing to its good reputation and academic rigor. The school was widely known to provide quality education as its alumni had been placed into reputable and prestigious universities. It had a robust and competitive college-going culture. It was common to spot students wearing college paraphernalia and sharing their test scores. Sunny Peng reasoned that her parents moved to the city because Redstone “has been known for its good education and how they teach their students.

And a majority of the students who graduate from Redstone go to college and stuff.” Sunny also argued how her family was not the exception—she knew that Asian families in the area were drawn to this school because of its “high commitment to education.” She discussed, “I would say education is a big part of [...] growing up in an Asian family; education is like the most important thing, and I think that's what people are drawn to the school for. It's like, for the education.”

Rationale for Site Selection

In addition to my amicable relationships with youth participants from Redstone High School and prior knowledge of the school site, a rationale for the site selection is behind its pursuit of illuminating the experiences of the growing Asian immigrant community in a predominantly white and affluent suburban school (Warikoo, 2022). The racial inequality of suburbanization and the recent rise in settlement of racially minoritized and low-income populations in suburbia (Diamond & Posey-Maddox, 2020), shed the importance of considering how race and spatial arrangement intersect within and through suburban schooling (Diamond et al., 2021). Albeit the generalizability of the findings often gets challenged due to the nature of studying specific context(s) in ethnographic research, this study aims to represent in-depth a larger phenomenon that could be observed through “vertical,” “horizontal,” and “transversal” dimensions (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2014). While this ethnography is not multi-sited, the power of such methodology makes possible the synthesis of “the complex assemblages of power that come to bear on policy formation and appropriation across multiple sites and scales” (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2014, p. 131).

Terminology and Language Use

I frequently use the term “East Asian American” to refer to the Chinese (excluding Taiwanese) and Korean American participants. Further, the term “South Asian American” is used to refer to the Indian American participants. Although the terms “East Asian American” and “South Asian American” are broader categorizations that encompass Americans who trace their heritage back to countries not limited to China, India, and Korea (e.g., Bangladesh, Japan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Taiwan), I use “East Asian American” interchangeably with “Chinese American” and “Korean American”; and “South Asian American” with “Indian American.” Additionally, I use, for example, “Chinese” rather than “Chinese American” only when the participants referred to themselves like so out of respect for their self-identification. I also use the term “Asian American” when talking about the study participants who are either East or South Asian Americans. Lastly, the use of various terms to describe the participants does not distinguish whether they were born in or outside the United States. All the participants in my study are 1.5-generation or second-generation immigrants.

The non-English words, concepts, and phrases that appear throughout the dissertation are in Korean. As the study participants were aware that I am bilingual (with a proficiency in both Korean and English), some spoke to me in Korean or both Korean and English during the interviews and casual conversations. Words spoken in Korean are followed by their English translations in brackets.

Conclusion

This chapter outlined the research design and methodology of the study, which include the data collection and analysis processes. I also disclosed my own researcher positionality and insider-outsider perspective, which I deeply reflected upon throughout the eight months of fieldwork at Redstone High School. Subsequently, I illustrated the context of the research site in

relation to its school district and the local community. A section on terminology and language use has been provided in this chapter as well. The following chapters focus on the research findings. Chapter three discusses issues concerning race, racism, and inequity, as identified in Redstone High School.

Chapter 3: Race in Redstone High School

The chapter is prefaced with a general description of the racial context of the school, followed by a discussion of how Black and Brown youths are framed within this specific context. Subsequently, it introduces the broader sociocultural background to situate Asian students in relation to Black and Brown students to offer emphasis on the positioning of East and South Asian American youths within the school and the dominant narratives linked to race, which are embedded within education systems that, in turn, adopt policies and practices that propagate inequities and racial hierarchy. For example, the policies and practices discussed in this chapter include the segregation of racial groups based on surveillance and tracking, which positions Black and Brown youths at the bottom of a systemic “racial hierarchy” wherein white students are placed at the very top. In such a pyramid, Asian youth characterized the middle and were shielded from anti-Blackness. Their access to perceived racial privilege, which is often mistaken for complete acceptance and equality, offers Asian youth the liberty that allows them to be negligent toward issues of race.

Pathologization of Black and Brown Youths

Recently, Redstone High School was a witness to an increase in the number of students of color: Black and Brown students due to redistricting, and Asian students due to the rise in settlements of Asian immigrants and newcomers. I asked Katie Williams, a white senior student who attended middle and high schools for years within the same district, if she had observed a shift in the attitudes or responses toward the influx of Black, Brown, and/or immigrant students. She replied that the school only had a handful of Black students, who were obvious among the white-dominant school population due to the lack of Black students despite the recent influx. She

also stated that the lack of fair representation of the Black community is what undergirds a pathologizing gaze toward Black youths among both adults and students.

- Katie: Yeah, I think in younger grades, there are more Black students for sure, like when I first started out, there probably were like two main ones people knew about...
- Joan: Of the whole grade?
- Katie: Yeah, it's a large school too and not a small school and so they were like two that like everyone knew who like walking around the halls and they're both kids who also have a mental disability and so those are the only Black students we were exposed to, that's kind of what people expected Black students to be like too.
- Joan: Wait, huh?
- Katie: Yeah, those who walked around the hall and not go to classes, basically. Obviously, people don't want to admit that that's what they're thinking but like subconsciously, like whatever you're exposed to creates like a prototype of what you're thinking about with people. So, what your first interactions are, that's what you're going to kind of have underlying...

In addition to underrepresentation, the pathologization of Black students stemmed from the prevailing sentiments that associated them with inherent intellectual inferiority and/or disabilities. Studies have shown that African Americans are at risk of being overrepresented in special education (Annamma et al., 2013; Losen & Orfield, 2002; Skiba et al., 2008; Sullivan & Artiles, 2011). Parrish (2002) demonstrated how African American students remain three times as likely to be categorized as having mental retardation (MR), 1.5 times more likely to be categorized as having learning disabilities (LD), and twice as likely to be categorized as having emotional disabilities (ED), relative to their white counterparts. The deviance of youth of color was not only associated with a lack of intelligence but also “immutable and pathological abnormality” (Erevelles & Minear, 2010, p. 132), which withheld them from access to rigorous courses, educational needs, higher expectations, and appropriate accommodations for diagnostic categories (Annamma et al., 2013).

However, even in cases where students of color struggled with actual learning disabilities, racism pathologized them as “dumb and insubordinate” (interview, 2/20/2020). Mr.

David Levy, a student support staff, revealed how the school staff affiliated and pervasively referred to the behavioral and emotional qualities of minority students, specifically Black students, as “insubordinate,” oppositional, and defiant (Gregory & Thompson, 2010). Moreover, drawing from what David mentioned, Katie, among other youths, also expressed how Black and Brown youths at Redstone High were perceived as deficient and inferior—individuals who needed “fixing” and became easy targets of control and regulation through oppressive institutional conventions including but not limited to extreme disciplinary practices. This is what David had to say:

Yes, insubordinate is still on our code of conduct and it's still a word that comes out of people's mouths—administrator's mouths—when they're talking about students. Most influentially, it's a word that's used by this campus support, who seems to always... every dean who's come through... and I've seen five? six? five different deans in this school and he always has their ear. He's always saying something like he did just at the beginning of this month as I passed by him and I've stopped getting involved in the conversations but as I walked by, he is talking to the school police officer and the new dean—the newest dean—and he's saying, “We just haven't sent enough of them home yet” and I was like ‘I'm not even... I don't know what that conversation is about, I have a pretty good feeling and I just don't want to confirm that you're saying, if we send more of the minority or problem students home then our school will be better you know...’ and it's... interacting with this mentality is... perhaps the greatest struggle I have.

During passing periods and even after the start of classes, groups of students of color occupied the entranceway of the second floor of the central library, trickling into either the library or the hallway. If one was to enter through the entrance on the second floor of the library, one would see the Black Student Union (BSU) room and the tutoring center on the left, located diagonally away from the computer lab. The tutoring center is located right next to the BSU room, which was also often utilized as the Office of Student and Family Engagement, which was replete with an all-Black staff with three Black campus support staff members, who altogether represented the only Black adults and staff in the entire building. Ms. Josephine Miller, a librarian who had recently moved from a larger city nearby, told me how the second floor was

“reserved for students of color and those who need extra help” (fieldnotes, 9/17/2019). In an attempt to strike up a conversation with me, another librarian commented that the “disenfranchised students, the ones who hate school” (personal communication, 11/7/2019) tend to hang out on the second floor and make a ruckus. She added that she spends a good portion of the day scolding the students to keep quiet or disperse them to their respective classes. This represents specific behavioral expectations for Black and Brown students rooted in the widespread view that they tend to have behavioral issues and oppositional attitudes toward schooling.

However, the few who sympathized with them were the ones who witnessed the lives of the youths up close and worked with them on a daily basis. The director of the tutoring center spoke about how her students would be closely monitored or questioned more frequently, as compared to their white counterparts, regardless of the time and place. Her students of color, who hung out in the library, would be surveilled by other staff members while white students in similar situations would merely be regarded as a juvenile, and quite possibly, in a more positive light.

The data from my observations indicate a common pattern of “Black and Brown students sticking together, hanging out together in the hallways, mostly in the foyer near the main entrance of the school building” (fieldnotes, 11/19/2019), which was not observed among Asian or white students. Black and Brown students regularly flocked to peer groups of the same race before the first period, between periods, and during lunchtimes and after-school hours. Both school personnel and Asian students with whom I interact on a daily basis mentioned how Black students were generally bounded together in their social units while Brown students would interact only with their own racial affinity group as well (Schwalbe et al., 2000). There were

designated spots and spaces throughout campus where different racial groups, such as the African American and Latinx groups, in particular, formed territorial “boundary work” (Thorne, 1993). Nonetheless, they were pushed to the peripheries in both the literal and figurative sense to occupy isolated spaces within the building. Black and Brown youths were not only segregated by race but also uprooted and coerced into occupying marginal spaces that set a distance between classrooms and hallways and between the in-school and out-of-school spaces.

Criminalization of Black and Brown Youths

Through the “racist discursive formation” (Ferguson, 2000, p. 79) of African American boys, Ferguson (2000) argues how they have been historically “doubly displaced: as black children, they are not seen as childlike but adultified; as black males, they are denied the masculine dispensation constituting white males as being ‘naturally naughty’ and are discerned as willfully bad” (p. 80). Black students become objects of control, faced with surveillance and scrutiny due to their perceived innate qualities of culpable behaviors. They are often viewed intrinsically as incorrigible boys who need to be contained because they are “less social” and “closer to nature”; and consequently, “less human” (Ferguson, 2000, p. 80). In Redstone High School, Black boys were generally observed to be on a path toward self-destruction due to the maladaptive and dysfunctional behaviors associated with them, which threaten themselves and the microcosm of society they are part of. The criminalization of Black youths is apparent in their treatment—they are stripped of any attributes related to innocence and naivete. Ms. Lindsey Robinson, a female paraprofessional staff who worked closely with groups of Black and Brown students with and without disabilities, shared several incidents where her students were falsely accused of something they did not do.

...And even here when one of my students has been accused of I don't even know what he was accused of but they said that they had him on camera and he swore that he didn't

do it and he wanted to see the video but they won't let him see it and they just seemed like they were getting him in trouble for whatever this was and then Darian said, 'I'm going to go check the camera one more time' and if it wasn't for him and no one have checked, he would have just gotten punished.

She also spoke about how Black and Brown students are more prone to being publicly criminalized for actions they may or may not have committed. She indicated that white students are rarely put in positions where they are publicly humiliated or shamed whereas students of color are targeted and coerced into accepting these forms of punishment.

Ms. Robinson: And another time, they took his phone and had to go through it for some investigation on drugs or weed in school and they said he could have it after that block so he came down after that block and they wouldn't give it to him and then he got really mad and also because the dean... this was the first time he cried in front of me because the dean went in and took him out of class in front of bunch of white kids and everyone thought he was in trouble and he cried because he felt embarrassed but he thinks white kids already think he's bad because of his color and now he got embarrassed out of the whole class so he didn't want to go back to that class anymore because he got embarrassed by it. Like the dean could have just talked to the teacher and 'Oh, can you send him out to the hall' or something rather than go in and be like, 'Get your backpack' in front of the whole class. And then they took his phone, and he was told he could get it afterwards and won't give it to him. He was like, 'I did what you said, and you said that I could have it after this block,' but officer wouldn't give it to him and then the admin ended up coming in and, 'I'm sorry, you're right, I'm sorry that I didn't give it to you' I don't know. They just said they were wrong...

Joan: So, he had done nothing wrong?

Ms. Robinson: Yeah, so like I was getting really mad for a while 'cause why are you all trying to get him in trouble. I mean I guess they have to investigate it because they thought they had seen him smoking outside in the camera or something, I don't know. Some other reason they don't trust people is 'cause even when they're telling the truth, no one believes them so...Jaquan smelled like weed when he got here but he said he didn't have anything on him and I wasn't going to say anything 'cause like he came to school, he wants to be here, he wants to learn, and he doesn't have anything on him so he wouldn't do anything anyway [...] I know that they smoke and how they sell it outside of school and everything but at least when they're here, we can try to engage them to learning and stuff instead of just, they're going to do it anyway outside so and if they keep getting mad at school because of that stuff then they will eventually not come. That's all.

From my observation and findings, Black and Brown students at Redstone High were frequently branded by campus support and staff as “willfully bad” (Ferguson, 2000) and repeat offenders. None of the school authorities I interacted with questioned the nature of the “problem” of disciplinary exclusions and their adverse assumptions regarding students of color. The quick turnaround on administering office discipline referrals, in/out-of-school suspension, and expulsion in the context of managing vast forms of behavioral infractions allowed deficit perspectives, low expectations, and destructive conventions to go unchallenged. Needless to say, the harmful effects of exclusionary interventions on socioemotional, behavioral, and academic outcomes were largely unchecked as well.

Differential Policing and Disciplining

Before joining Redstone High, Mr. Levy admitted that he struggled to make sense of the so-called “racial achievement gap” in a school that is well-resourced and located where the “ostensive purposes of the district are in alignment with best practices” (interview, 2/20/2020). However, his outlook on the racial differences in terms of academic outcomes shifted considerably when he became acquainted with the structural racial inequalities that students negotiate with to survive and navigate through school spaces. All aspects of the school shape its environment and contribute to the academic performance of students. Lewis and Diamond (2015) argue that if the presence of certain student groups is imminently susceptible to racial profiling, the school can no longer be deemed conducive to academic excellence. This is what Mr. Levy had to say:

The big surprise was that you know, one, from my context, this is a rich school they got so much money and they have a relatively lax set of teachers so my first-year impressions I was like “Man, you kids got it good. What's your problem? Why aren't you in class?” So, I came from that background sort of very naive and more on the side of the establishment thinking of like ‘Oh my goodness we need to teach you things. Come, let us teach you things.’ And as that year progressed, I started noticing that... it's not like it's

majority African-American or Latin people in the hallways, it's just they're the ones that get stopped. They're the ones that always have this one guy in particular, who is the lead of the campus support, who is chewing out, verbally abusing, following, or otherwise puffing up and walking with a body language that in my understanding is exuding militant police like... persona that is designed specifically to intimidate people into compliance with his rules.

During an interview with Mr. Levy, who worked closely with low-performing students who are mostly Black, Brown, and Southeast Asian on a daily basis, he summed up the disciplinary system of the school as a “corporal punishment authority structure” (interview, 2/20/2020) where punitive measures are not applied consistently. Although school rules are written in a race-neutral language and expected to be enforced uniformly, the staff and students attest to a discrepancy in their practical enactment (Lewis & Diamond, 2015). The racial disparity in disciplinary sanctions at Redstone High followed a troublesome yet common pattern of inequity, characterized by a chasm across racial lines in terms of its punitive practices (Carter et al., 2017). The following quote is sourced directly from an interview with Mr. Levy.

I see many conflicts based on the expectations of people operating in that culture trying to apply it outside that micro-culture so they're expecting other teachers in it and especially students to follow that same ranking system and to give deference. There's also different forms of deference that are given. There's the knowledge that you must... an alignment with the academic structure there's also sort of like a corporal structure, like a corporal punishment authority structure being involved in dispensing of punishment... is also one of the ways to earn status in this so this is like these parallel tracks. In that culture...you are expected to... to know who you're dealing with and the context who to give deference to or... or who to yield to. Um, our campus support guy and our [unknown] would very much like you to yield in all things that involved behavior, loud noises, and children's bodies not being in the right places. The academic side also wants you to yield where kids are not in the right places...they'll yield on like loudness to...send them home or like just tell them to be quiet. That choice is made based on who is interacting at that moment, like what adults are present. I see that being one of the interesting things is from maybe a year and a half or two years ago there was someone being loud and some girls down there and one of them is... there's a lot of boisterousness or bravado like posturing that goes into... just communicating. And so, he... he put her in a hold, he put her up against the wall, put her in like a restrictive like wrestling hold, and then took her down to the ground.

Mr. Levy was cognizant of the stark differences in policing and disciplining practices across the students' perceived racial identities. Moreover, his claim is supported by information shared by a math teacher as well. In the context of disproportional rates of out-of-school-suspension in the 2018-2019 school year, 7 out of 97 black students (7.2%) and 5 out of 184 Latinx students (2.7%) were suspended, in contrast with 21 out of 1611 white students (1.3%), none of the 185 Asian students (0%), and no students who identified with a mixed-race (0% of 67 students). While I was unable to acquire the rates of in-school suspension and expulsion by race, the math teacher mentioned that a disproportionate number of students of color with disabilities were being referred for suspension or expulsion. These statistics resemble prior studies that have demonstrated how students of color with or without disabilities, particularly Black and Brown students, are overrepresented in office discipline referrals (Bradshaw et al., 2010; Skiba et al., 2002), in/out-of-school suspension (Gregory et al., 2010; Sullivan et al., 2014), and expulsion (Skiba et al., 2011), relative to their white peers.

The Discipline Room and the In-House Suspension Room

The in-school suspension room, commonly referred to as the discipline room, was a windowless, dark, closet-sized room with a large desk, a desktop, and several small classroom desks facing the whiteboard installed in front of the room. Although the in-school suspension room on the first floor served many purposes including a base for the school's lost-and-found, its main purpose was to monitor and encourage the hall wanderers, those who refuse to go to class, and students who display "challenging" and "disruptive" behaviors to stay focused on classwork or exams under the watch of a staff member. It was open only when at least one campus support staff member could oversee the students in the room. The staff also served as tutors who helped them with their work, apart from exams or standardized tests. Serving multiple functions, the

space of the room was fluid but always occupied by Black and Brown students who were often referred to as “troublemakers” by school personnel. Mrs. Chue, the director of one of the student support programs at Redstone High, spoke about how she believes these spaces were controlled by the school staff.

Room] 2800 is the school wide support so for example, if you have a class and each class has about 30 students, right? You do 30 minutes of lecturing and then the rest of the class is for like work time and if the students are too distractive to either everybody else or to themselves, they can be sent to that room to do independent work. Make sense. Ideally, it's a great idea. It's being abused as a place to send “troublemakers” and I say that in quotes. Whatever troublemaker is to each other... 1246, the one downstairs by the athletic office. That's the in-room suspension, in-school suspension room. That room was used for in-school suspension so if you were in your suspension but you're in in-school suspension, you would go in and report to that room to 1246 and do your work. And campus support would just sit there and watch you do...and I'm like, ‘That's a horrible idea.’

As I had spent most of my time shadowing and interacting with East and South Asian students who are rarely identified as “deviants,” much like my study participants, I was unaware of the existence of the two isolated rooms designated for disciplinary purposes until a couple of months into my fieldwork. Mrs. Chue, who was very familiar with them, explained how they typically end up with mostly Black and Brown students.

Joan: Well, I've been hearing a lot of different things about the room and there's a lot of my study participants have no idea what that room is, and I've been visiting that room a lot and I've been seeing a lot of Black and Brown kids come in, I only saw one or two white kids coming in with their Black and Brown friends...Why are the majority of the students not aware of these spaces?

Mrs. Chue: In Redstone, there's been a big issue on...hall walkers, students who don't go to class, they check in, they go to class, check in and come out. They just wander around the halls, and some are being too distracted to other classroom, other is just like they just want to walk the halls and don't want to go to class so I believe the idea of the room is to help create a space in which they can go to, which is a great idea. But if you end up doing that, like you said, it's a Black and Brown room.

Pushout of Black and Brown Youths

Race in the Hallway

On any given day at Redstone High School, the hallways and corridors are swarming with teachers and students moving from classroom to classroom during the intermissions between periods. During this short span of time before the bell rings, students are seen hanging out with their friends, using the bathroom before heading to their next class, watching Snapchat or TikTok videos on their phones, or talking about the class assignment they worked on the previous night or the surprise test they just came out of. With the ebb and flow of students moving through the hallway is a freedom enjoyed for a brief while, right before the bell rings, when they are all expected to be in their designated positions. However, be it during class periods or lunchtime, race was an important factor that led particular groups to be surveilled and controlled (Meiners, 2007); somehow, race always seemed to matter in the navigation of school spaces. Mr. David Levy, a student support staff, spoke about how race play a role in youth-adult interactions and relationships in school spaces.

So, race do play it in here, you can see it walking down the halls, you can see it in your students' eyes when they're really just talking in the library in terms of how staff would approach students of color versus who student who is white. At first, I was like, 'Maybe it's just like I'm here, I'm new, I'm just seeing this stuff, but the longer I stay the more it becomes more visual, more like true that it is...you see that wonders... when a student of color comes in, staff go in and intervene, 'Why are you here? Do you have a pass?' versus if there is a white student coming in even though they're being loud, they don't intervene. So, it's like, I see that and like, students see that, and I'm like, 'Okay, I get it. what can we do about it?' That's a good question, I really don't know.

He continued to explain how the students of color are stopped frequently, watched carefully, and spoken to aggressively by school support staff in the hallways.

It's the performative aspect...actual applying the district policy or being consistent with the policy or monitoring your own ways of speaking and communicating with students. Students are often greeted with, "Where are you supposed to be?" Which like... to me, this is now a slap in the face with the baggage of any time a white person in power speaks to a person of a lower second... even lower socioeconomic status, let alone minorities. "Where are you supposed to be?" This legacy is raw for any of our students.

Drawing from the previous discussion, students of Redstone High were also conscious of the discrepancies in behavioral expectations from staff and teachers based on race. Katie argued that students of color, specifically Black and Brown students, were not only stopped more frequently in the hallways but that the campus support staff also assumed that they would ditch class. In contrast, Katie and other white students would be given the benefit of the doubt.

I think what I noticed too was that we would have more campus support and the more we got, like the less they were enforcing any rules on those kids at all and so it's like they wouldn't... like they would ask them why they're in the halls and say go to class but once they said no, they would be like, 'Okay, you're not going to class.' And they would try to have a conversation with them which I get, they're trying to make it comfortable for the kids to feel like, I don't know... someone they can talk to but at the same time, they kind of also expected them not to go to class and now like when we're in the halls, we expect that they're out of class and not like versus if someone sees me in the hallway, 'Oh, she's going to an appointment or something' or 'She's leaving for something' but when you see them in the hallway, 'Oh, they're just ditching class'. It's kind of the expectation...

Rather than attempting to comprehend the roots that represent the reasons for which Black and Brown students are reluctant in terms of staying in classrooms, teachers and staff are quick to send the students to the discipline room, naively thinking “that’s what they want” (interview, 3/13/2020). Students’ seemingly unmotivated and disengaged behaviors in classrooms were all it took for them to be sent to the discipline room. Students who struggle to stay in classes were once again secluded from learning opportunities and spaces. It was not only the students who displayed various forms of behavioral infractions who experienced a loss of instructional time, consequently leading to delayed academic growth, grade retention, and academic failure, among other outcomes. Some deliberately got into “trouble” to be sent to the discipline room as an “occasion for scaping from classroom conditions of work, for self-expression, for making a name for yourself, having fun, for both actively contesting adult rules and power, as well as for the sly subversion of adult prohibitions” (Ferguson, 2000, p. 31). Students who were used to being

“pulled out” from classes anticipated placement in an alternative school (Dunbar, 1999; Raywid, 1999) that shared school grounds with Redstone or the labor market (Fine & Rosenberg, 1983).

Mr. Levy explained the observed recurring pattern of disdain and acrimony towards the school.

And another thing that happens is we have this program where you... I don't know how to deal with it. It's a tragedy. They know that if they wait until their 11th grade year, if they have like a zero point something GPA they can get into a special program where they go on an accelerated path to graduation in those last two years and they're pulled out of regular class. So, the word on the street is: if you're a minority student and if you don't really like dealing with these... guys and gals up here, just skip all your classes for two years... yeah, they'll harass you a little bit, you might get a ticket but eventually you'll get to this other program where you can actually work one-on-one with people. That was the way it was the first two years, that was a very common thing. I think it's changed now, some of the kids that were... that my first freshmen and first sophomores that were talking about this strategy um... we've seen them turn around. They don't go to every class, but they go to classes and then there are some that are gone; that are in this program or at the charter school, but I'd say more than half have stuck around and are starting to go back to school, which is cool. I don't know how—if we had an influence there... I hope so but then I also hope that they have enough supports outside that they didn't need me to get there.

The paraprofessionals among the staff who provided these youths with instructional, behavioral, and psychosocial support, at least attempted to develop sociohistorical and sociocultural understandings of the reasonings behind youths' “behavioral infractions.” Ms. Robinson argued that the hall wanderers did not feel like they belonged or fit in within their classrooms. She said,

One of the biggest challenges are...it's hard to get them to want to go to class and some of the reasons why they don't want to go is they feel uncomfortable because often they're like the only African American person in the room and they always say like, at other schools, there's more people of color and they felt more comfortable so a lot of times, they say they don't like Redstone High.

According to Mrs. Chue, the reason why Black students preferred roaming the halls rather than staying in classes is rooted in the school's lack of diversity and representation. She explained,

The fact that if your friends aren't in class, and when you know you are less than 10 percent of the student population, the chance of you having another peer who looks like you are in class is very slim, and when you add to the factor... they're lost.

Mr. Levy articulated his observations of how teachers' perceptions and biases significantly contribute to the pushing of Black and Brown youths out of classrooms and into the hallways. He meaningfully makes sense of this phenomenon and shared his interpretation of the administrators' framework for making students' truancy intelligible. He elucidated that the "pull" factors fixated upon by administrators are students' flights to safety while the "push" factors are greater in force, thrusting students out of learning spaces and the school together altogether, allowing them to fall through the cracks.

Mr. Levy: One of those things I saw in the first year that went into my little report was, a student—an African American student—I came into a geometry class, he was sitting there and they're doing teamwork. The teamwork consisted of, everyone does one step in the process of solving an equation and it's passed around so one step at a time, you do one line of the proof and then you move it to the next person. It got to this gentleman, and he was thinking about it. [...] It seemed like it was familiar, but he didn't quite know what to do and... there were two white females and one white male. The white male...uh, I get the impression by his attire that he was probably sort of... what you might call a jock or a sporty-er kind of well-kept person and he started saying, "He doesn't know it. Do you know it? Why you taking so long? You don't know what's going on. You're never in here. You know, he can't do it." And he starts [unknown], making the two white females very uncomfortable because they're being observed by this... this you know official guy in a little uniform: me. And the Black student reacts in the following way: he leans back in his chair, he looks over to one of his friends, and he starts talking to his friend and the other goes, "Look, you're not doing it. He's not doing it. Just give it to me" and then the girls are like "C'mon on, but we could just do it for you... or do this..." and trying to like you know, negotiate that awkward social space and so he's like [...] it had struck me. He looked back at me, and I got it. He's in a lose-lose game. If he... if he complies, he is giving them the power. If he fails, he's validated their assumptions and so he did the only thing that he can do, and I finally understood it. It's brilliant. He refuses to play the game. It's a game theoretic convention. This is high-level... probabilistic thinking. And so, he refuses to play the game, he sees that this is going nowhere, he gets up, and he takes the bathroom pass, and he walks out. The teacher says "Where are you going? You can't leave" and he goes "I'm going to the bathroom" and she says, "You don't have my permission" and he shuts the door behind him and she's coming over to me and huffing like, "How rude. The attitude that these children have." And I'm like 'You didn't see what just happened in your class?'
Joan: She couldn't see what happened.

- Mr. Levy: And... and she didn't. And well... it's... that is so emblematic of multiple other instances I've seen, where [...] I think that the administration feels that there is either... there's a pull... there is a gravitational pull or something, some force outside of the classroom that pulls students out of there. And I would argue that there is an equal, if not superior force that is pushing them out. And I tried to delay that... in that report that there's a push more than there's a pull and what pull there is, is the pull toward safety—someone that is also suffering. It's solidarity and that's been my contention over the past 3 years.
- Joan: Yeah, pushing them to the periphery and they would... their safe space is considered you know, in front of the student services or near the greeting station which is almost...
- Mr. Levy: Almost out the door.
- Joan: Out the door, yeah.

The pathologization and criminalization of Black and Brown youths discussed thus far, in addition to the experiences of invalidation by teachers and peers within classrooms, resulted in students being discouraged from persisting in spaces of learning. The data in this study evinces the continuance of how exclusionary disciplinary policies and practices domineering school spaces precipitate the likelihood of youth of color facing suspensions and expulsions (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Vavrus & Cole, 2002), dropping out of school (Christle et al., 2007), and transferring to alternative schools (Dunbar, 1999). Ironically enough, the very disciplinary system that intended to secure a safe learning environment became the institutional tool that continues to push Black and Brown students out of schools and towards the juvenile and criminal justice system through the school-prison nexus (Annamma, 2017; Morris, 2016).

White Privilege

According to the members of the school community, while students of color were not the only hall wanderers who bunked classes, they were certainly the main targets of disciplinary infractions. Similar to the claim of Mr. Levy, Mrs. Sua Chue also remarked that she often noticed how white students were insusceptible to the consequences of cutting classes. To illustrate, she provided the example of white school athletes frequently excusing themselves from class; these

students were rarely punished and given leeway in a variety of contexts, including getting out of class earlier and not turning in their assignments. Although students of color were rarely given second chances when caught, some were regarded as favorable, carrying more symbolic, social, and cultural capital, and taking advantage of the system. Mrs. Chue said, “They know every loophole, every nook, and cranny, so if there is a loophole, they’re going to go through it if they think they can get away with it.”

Katie Williams, a white senior, spoke about her personal experiences, wherein she observed how her friend was singled out when they walked together down the hallway. Ever since, she was more conscious of how things could pan out very differently for students of color, as opposed to white students, despite engaging in the same behavior in similar spaces and times.

So I was one time walking with my friend who’s half Jamaican and she... we were standing right next to each other and this campus support asked her what she was doing in the hall, and she was like, ‘Oh, I’m just walking across the lunch room’ and they didn’t ask me anything and I was like, ‘Okay, I get it maybe...you know, because we’re together, you just assume that answer but like they only directed the question at her and I kept on walking. Then we were separated at that point, and he didn’t ask me anything. And so that just felt uncomfortable too, he asked for her to show her pass and she was like, ‘That happens every time I’m in the hallway.’ And that literally never happened to me and so I was like ‘That’s crazy.’

One of the tutors explained how her students, who are primarily students of color, often argued that rules and discipline are differentially enforced based on race. They were fully aware of how students of color mainly experience harsher and more frequent punishment, in contrast with white students, who are rarely sanctioned for similar behavior. White privilege breeds practical consequences wherein white students are shielded from punitive measures and are allowed to “get away with” infractions. This is the account provided to me by Mrs. Chue:

So, I do know that whatever happened to according to my students, [they say], ‘I’m pretty sure the person who has not been impacted, but the person who is the perpetrator is a white rich kid.’ And I’m like, ‘What makes you think that?’ ‘Because they got away with it.’ And I was like, ‘Okay, so for example, if it wasn’t a white rich kid, and let’s say, a

Latina?’ They’re like, ‘They wouldn’t get away with it.’ I was like, ‘Okay, this is interesting.’

Students were fully aware of the discrepancies in the enforcement of disciplinary measures, which were based on race. Sarah Devi, a female Indian student from the 10th grade, has constantly heard of narratives where white students would face less punishment or no punishment at all, in comparison with Black and Brown students, despite the offense across groups having the same degree. Sarah spoke of a common theory shared by students in the context of racially disproportionate disciplinary practices.

So, what I’m hearing is like...what happens is that, even though a white kid might’ve done something very like similar to like a Black kid, they would get less punishment than the Black kid would. And that’s like most of the stories that I’ve heard.

As one of the staff members of color on the campus support team, Mr. Josh Moore confirmed how white privilege manifested with regards to adults responding differently to similar behaviors, based on the skin color of the students. He observed how white staff and teachers are ready to “come to the rescue of white students in distress” (personal communication, 1/24/2020) while the same group of adults would not think twice about their disciplinary actions toward Black students. The following vignette is from an interview with Mr. Moore:

It does feel like the long arm of justice doesn’t swing both ways. When it comes to students that’s not an African American student, not a minority student, right? I feel like all the administrators and the people in power will come to his rescue when the examples of him doing some of the same things that students of color do... I mean this young man will be saved, he will tell the teachers, ‘Shut the f*** up’ or he’s not doing anything or they’ll be walking around the halls on multiple occasions without passes but, you know... when his name goes over the radio, then you have a host of people in power that will just say, ‘Hey, I’ll go and take care of that or you know, just bring that student to my office for whatever’ and then you know when they talk about him and his levels of discipline, they always throw out that he has an IEP or special need or that nature but... having worked in special ed, I know that kids with special needs know behaviors and they know how to control behaviors and so... I think that the fact that he’s not a student of color is the primary reason why he gets a pass, he gets a wink wink and a shrug, you know and so [...] I was talking to one of my co-workers last week about how we tolerate, you know

because I am African American and I know our culture, right? When the kid the kid is talking to me, in a certain way then I'm just saying that I tolerate it better, you know?

Black and Brown students were not offered the same level of compassion or leniency as has been provided in abundance to white students. The transgressions of the youth of color were directly reciprocated with punitive measures. Mr. Levy recounted the day he was appalled due to the conversation he overheard among the campus support staff about a Black student. He mentioned that the staff, without even inquiring about the offense, spoke of how this particular student “deserved” to be suspended and that they belonged outside of school.

If it was just a white guy who did as many things as him, then it wouldn't been it. They'd just been like, ‘Oh, he's a bad guy.’ But then like with Jamal, they're like, ‘Oh, kick him out,’ and ‘Why is he still in school?’

Racial Segregation Within School

Segregated by Testing and Surveillance

In addition to disciplinary policies, academic policies were racialized, and students were segregated along the color line. During a Higap B math class on a typical day at Redstone High, a group of Indian American freshmen boys, including Diya, Dhruv, and Henry were talking about their final tests and grades, the most common topic that comes up among the students who are academically engaged. When I seated myself at an empty seat to join them at the table, the boys immediately broached the subject and one said, “This school says that it tries to be inclusive? But it's super racist,” as if he wanted me to lean into what he had to say. Following his lead, I asked him what he meant by his statement, to which he responded by explaining how he got pulled out for Standardized Test for the Assessment of Reading (STAR) testing although he and his friends are “smart.” To his knowledge, the administrative staff had gone through students' records and pulled out students with “non-white-sounding last names,” so they could take the test separately from the rest of the student body. The other friend in the group told me

that his friend's Indian dad was enraged about his son being pulled out; thus, he demanded that the administration organize an assembly to explain what had happened. While the dad was not part of the PTA, he was the reason for which the school ended up organizing an assembly to communicate with the parents whose children were affected by this incident. As the other boy was listening to two of his friends, he mentioned how he too was on the list, although his advisory teacher got him to switch to a different Academic Support Resources (ASR) location, which was ultimately what led him to not get pulled out for testing.

The Asian students not only disapproved of the STAR testing scandal because of the school's "racist" practices but also felt wronged by the school as they were racially profiled. This personally affected them because they were, once again, verified as the "rest of the students of color" who could be subjected to different treatment, despite being considered the "book smart" minorities (Hatt, 2007). Regardless of how much they could outperform their white peers, they remained non-white students who could be treated just like their Black and Brown peers. In a separate conversation with Farid Bhatia, a sophomore Indian American, he expressed how he could have been one of the students who were racially profiled that day. He was fully aware of how the school had physically and spatially isolated the low-performing racial minorities to "pull up their test grade" in order to raise the school's overall scores. This is what Farid said:

I didn't get pulled out, but like some of the people who got pulled out though were like supposed to be like, you know, racial minorities that are supposed to pull up their test grade, you know, like some of like the rumors were like, 'Oh, these people got pulled [out] because they were like weren't smart or something.' So...it's just freaky how people like that can get into our schools and treat our students like that.

The students regarded the STAR testing incident as a testament to what some may consider the racist practices of the school due to its preconceived notions regarding Black and Brown students not testing well and skipping advisory classes where standardized tests were

regularly administered. The STAR testing evinced the schools' partial dispositions that further solidified stratified schooling and cultural politics of race (Dumas et al., 2016; Giroux 2000; Hall, 1990; Lipman, 2004), wherein racialized youths (e.g., Black youths) are imagined as needing surveillance and containment while others are wrongly regarded (e.g., Asian youths) as those complying to authority and demonstrative of "good" behavior. This is what Sophia had to say about the STAR testing incident and representations of Black and Brown youths:

It was pretty recent, so freshman and sophomore kids had to take the STAR testing and they were called in...so people were missing those tests and they were required to come in during ASR to library, but they only call...required Brown or Black people to come in because... And that was, that was not true, because a lot of white kids also skipped STAR testing, so I think that was really racist. Yeah, I think Redstone is pretty racist.

Nikhil, a sophomore Indian American male student, argued that the misjudgment of the school in segregating students by race to administer STAR tests was mired by its focus on testing and scores, which directly translated into the performance of the school. This scandal was a consequence of the school's emphasis on high-stakes accountability and test preparation; unsurprisingly, Nikhil further added that at Redstone High, educational performance and outcome were prioritized over offering intellectually rigorous and engaging learning experiences (Au, 2011; Demerath, 2009). The practice of assessing students using narrow measures of evaluation holds teachers and students accountable with the same benchmarks that "take place on a single main axis of achievement" (Parsons, 1959, pp. 300). Those who underperform in terms of standardized tests are labeled as deficient, often removed altogether from regular classrooms, offered much more streamlined lessons and curricula, and surveilled closely. Such practices offer no leeway to students who are molded by backgrounds and life experiences that are different from those of students who belong to the dominant group. In doing so, students of color, who need broader and more expansive educational experiences and opportunities, are further

marginalized by studying according to narrowed curricula. Ultimately, teaching test-taking skills and strategies gained preeminent importance over realistic knowledge and understanding of the world due to such high-stakes standardized testing curricula and their associated culture.

They're too focused on my test scores, in my opinion. Were you here for that scandal where ... the racism thing or whatever? I don't know how I feel about it, but it was obviously bad. I don't know. A lot of my friends who are considered, I don't know, high achieving, feel that they are being pushed back to the middle. There aren't enough advanced learning opportunities for them within the school, they have to go do it by themselves whereas Lincoln High, they actually put a focus on advanced learning opportunities which is also what my mom feels. My mom thinks the average education at Redstone High is better, but for advanced kids that Lincoln was better because they [offer] you with more opportunities.

In agreement, Farid also regarded the pulling out of minority students as an act of reinforcing the school's image and serving its best interests than those of the students.

- Joan: Do you think that kind of intervention was put in place for the school's or the student's best interest?
- Farid: For the school.
- Joan: Really?
- Farid: I feel like it was for the school's image.
- Joan: What do you mean?
- Farid: As in like, I think it was something along the lines of, uh, we'll take a whole bunch of racial, like this one teacher was like, look, I think we should take, I think it's one teacher, one administrator like acted on her own and she was like, [...] she like took a bunch of racial minorities to, you know, take the STAR test to like pull up the school's image that like, 'Oh yeah, our racial minorities do really good on tests and we like educate get them well.'

The topic of the STAR testing scandal came up rather frequently in conversations, transforming into a symbolic representation that evoked the image of Redstone High as "racist." During a conversation with Dhruv, the topic of racism was followed by the topic of the STAR testing incident, which was starting to become a usual occurrence. He said, "The students are racist, and it's also the school itself that demonstrates how it's racist. You know about the STAR testing incident, right? And the use of N-word, and slangs, and not-so-good words." I urged, "Have you ever been called something?" He shook his head, but continued, "People think I must

be smart because I'm Indian. People say, 'You're Indian, you're smart.' I guess it's not bad, but people give me more work" (personal communication, 1/9/2020). I pressed him to think about the students who would be labeled as the opposite of "smart" if he and the Asian students were considered the smart ones. Although he did not seem to have an opinion on this, he mentioned that the Black and Brown students may be labeled as the "not-so-smart ones" because they were pulled out during STAR tests and "given help" (personal communication, 1/9/2020). The STAR testing scandal reaffirmed the common belief shared by students that the school, which itself was discriminatory, perceived the darker-skinned youth of color as lacking in intellect.

Although Redstone High is better funded than many other educational institutions across the greater metropolitan area and has been regarded as carrying a reputation for being "one of the best," the students believe that it has exerted its resources and efforts into building facilities and maintaining its reputation solely based on test score data. It was no wonder then that the non-Asian students of color in low-track courses picked up on the sociocultural cues that led them to identify the school's need for them to perform well on standardized tests, not for their own sake but for upholding the reputation of the institution as a competitive and academically driven space. Mr. David Levy was indignant that the school made one of his students feel not only unwanted in classes but also discarded with regard to test scores and school performance.

David: Some of the other things that people have told me...one, I had a very perceptive student... my first couple of years. He said he knew; he knows exactly what was going on and I think that we're much in alignment. He's like "The only way... the only reason they're upset about us, is us Black kids—he's a young Black man—they don't want us in class because we don't do good on the test and they need good test scores to get their funding, to keep their jobs. And I was like, 'Holy...you saw right through it.'

Joan: He's very aware.

David: And so, if a 9th grader can figure that out you know, no wonder.

The differentiated regulation and control of students of color in the STAR testing scandal served as a symbolic representation of the hierarchy of intelligence. Caraballo (2014) documents how students who achieve well in tests and standardized tests were labeled as high achievers in the figured world of schooling. Testing measurements were regarded as sufficiently valid to label certain students as “engaged” and “hard-working.” Both Hatt (2007) and Rubin (2007) recognized that smartness is constructed culturally and ideologically within figured worlds of schools. Students were schooled to comprehend the idea of “smartness” by engaging with concepts such as grades, papers, labels, standardized test scores, books, large vocabulary, and participation in college prep courses. The mediating artifacts deemed smartness as a tangible concept while operating as gatekeeping mechanisms. Only when students got past the “shared valuation of achievement,” (Parsons, 1959) were they considered smart, diligent, or deserving of differentiated rewards and privileges. Similarly, academic success at Redstone High School was defined by these rigid discourses, undergirded by the administration’s internalization of the common notions of high-achieving individuals and smartness. As Black and Brown students were misunderstood as individuals who were disengaged with their education, and consequently, underperforming, they were excluded and contained in monitored spaces in the context of the STAR testing, which neutrally appeared as conducive to facilitating low performers to test better.

In a system where high-stakes tests allow for the commodification of education (Au, 2009), which can be “quantified, regulated, and designed much as any other commodity” (Lipman, 2004, p. 64), standardized tests characterize a different tool of control by their very design. Students of color become targets of social discipline in the institutional forms of monitoring, scrutiny, and surveillance that are directed particularly toward African American and

Latinx students. The regime of educational accountability legitimizes pull-out practices and the sorting, surveillance, and remediation of students in an already highly stratified environment (Lipman, 2004). The inequitable act of presuming notions regarding racialized students based on standardized tests and performance is accompanied by the unethical conditioning and institutionalizing of these students according to essentialism and group representations, particularly in the absence of undifferentiated learning opportunities and experiences.

Segregated by Tracking

Students were not only segregated by surveillance and disciplinary practices but also using tracking policies and practices, which function as mechanisms to divide groups based on their differential capacities for learning and achievement (Oakes, 2005; Parsons, 1959; Tyson, 2011). The educational expectations based on tracking legitimize varying types of curricula offered to different groups of students. However, in addition to narrowing the curriculum, tracking assigns roles to students that are carried over into society, thereby naturalizing the establishment of social systems. Ms. Coraline Rose, a bilingual resource teacher in math and science classes, told me how the school is “unintentionally tracked” (personal communication, 9/19/2019) due to the language instructions and interventions required in classes. According to her, new students were put on the same track due to the classes they must take as English language learners. On the other hand, Asian and white students primarily occupied higher-tracked classes, rarely availing the chance to interact with individuals from the lower track, an issue that was notable in my observations of Black and Brown youths rarely taking up space within higher-tracked classes. Apart from a few Black and Brown students in advanced classes, white and Asian students typically enrolled in higher proportions.

Owing to the school's tracking practices, which are based on the misguided and presumed association between academic aptitude and race, students were already cognizant of the dominant racial narratives within the school, a fact that is evidenced by the viewpoints adopted by students regarding tracking and ability grouping. As a case in point, while Nikhil stated that he does not have a single Black peer in his high-honor math classes, he revealed how he had internalized the assumption that Asians are more likely to be in higher-tracked classes than Black students.

I don't think I have any African American kid in my AP Cal and BC class, which I don't know if I'm being racist, I wouldn't expect... It is possible and I'm sure there are lots of talented African Americans. I'm just saying that the average, well, in my mind—hopefully not racist mind—that the average Asian is more likely to be in AP Cal BC than the average African American.

Nikhil went on to argue how the common racial stereotypes are true, based on his less-than-two years of experience at the school.

I could say apples are better than oranges but that implies oranges are worse than apples. So, I guess that is one thing. I mean I'm not one to say if these stereotypes are true. I'm just saying based on what I've seen as one human in one city, in one school, I believe both stereotypes to be, I don't know, experimentally true.

Moreover, he brought forth the idea of cultural differences to explain the mechanism of tracking and the low enrollment of Black and Brown students in advanced classes, particularly the science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics (STEAM) classes.

I think it comes out of the differences between Asian and African American culture. I do think that there is at least a slight disparity between the number of Asians and African Americans within certain advanced classes, especially STEM classes. I don't know, but I see Asians are doing everything in STEM.

Though a significant amount of literature has demonstrated how tracking exacerbates inequality with little to no effect on the overall level of achievement (Gamoran, 2010), Redstone High School, like most secondary schools in the nation, was invested in the heavily tracked

curriculum. As lower tracks were growing farther apart from higher tracks in terms of achievement, harmful stereotypes established and hardened the positions of white and Asian students in higher tracks while Black and Brown students were immediately presumed to be in the lower tracks. The myth of meritocracy manifested in Redstone High via the tracking policies and practices embedded within the system, which were used to segregate students and strengthen notions of race-based intelligence and deservingness (Oakes, 2005).

The following quote is from a conversation from the school resource officer who spoke about how college-bound Asians are separated and insulated from “prevalent issues” allegedly found among other students of color due to tracking practices. Again, Asian youths were not only segregated by tracking but also reprieved from the criminalization and pathologization targeting Black and Brown youths.

Most East Asians I’m going to assume tend to be in that group of AP, IB students or college-bound. So, you are kind of separate—even if your general culture... in a school that is culturally um, have more prevalent issues of crime, drugs, they are usually insulated regardless of what school you go to. You’re...pretty insulated if you’re just in the college-bound classes; AP classes. And so, students that are at Lincoln and at Lakeview are going to have more cultural assets to pull from their experience to be more culture... culturally rich than the ones that are here and predominantly with upper middle class white people with parents that are typically from the industry.

“Asian Privilege”

Now that this chapter has presented the broad context wherein race implements and shapes disciplinary rules and narrativized discourses around Black and Brown students, the remainder of this chapter is devoted to the following question: Where do Asian American youths fit in the broader landscape of school discipline, culture, and educational opportunities at Redstone High? Some of the schooling experiences of Black and Brown students were in stark contrast to that of white students, while Asian students, similar to white students, were offered special treatment and even let off the hook sometimes. Asian American youths were placed

somewhat close to the white youths in the racial hierarchy; however, the purported images of Asians were slightly distinctive from those of whites. According to James Yoon, a Korean American male student, Asians were seen as people “who could never do anything wrong.” Although the segment of the interview depicted below carries a positive connotation associated with the representations of Asians, during the interview, I was able to feel an undertone of chagrin when James spoke about “Asian privilege.” The privilege Asians “possessed” carried distinctive symbolic forms that are not affiliated with white individuals. He described that in the eyes of white people, Asians are portrayed as those who could never “fail” and/or “do anything wrong.” The Asians were deemed as nearly inhuman figures, robotic, and programmed to be subservient and obsequious.

Joan: What are some advantages that you have over other students?

James: I guess, I guess like in terms of advantages, I guess like a lot of it is like, it’s like ... I’m, I’m trusted in that like I’m assumed innocent until guilty about like literally anything, like in like student or in teacher’s eyes and like I guess in the students’ eyes. So, [...] people assume that like I can never do anything wrong.

Joan: Do you ever feel like you have a free pass?

James: Yeah, I think so. I think there is, there have been a lot of like bullshit stuff that I’ve gotten away with in terms of academics that if I was like a Black or Hispanic kid, I would not have gotten away with or like even a white kid I would not have gone away with because they treat me as like some sort of person who could never do anything wrong. So...I can get away with it.

Shielded from Anti-Black Racism

At Redstone High, students, including whites and non-white students who are insulated through racial institutional formations are unable to reap the benefits of inclusion and diversity. Katie Williams, who self-identified as a white female student from a low-income working-class background, spoke about how she feels uncomfortable around Black people because she is socially and racially isolated in a white-dominant school. When asked if she considers diversity as important on campus, she responded affirmatively, explaining that her discomfort is

underpinned by the rarity associated with the need to interact with individuals from other racial groups. In the lack of interracial relationships within communities of life, it is rather natural for white students to completely tune out of the spirit oriented toward diversity. Katie stated,

Growing up, I knew I think like one Black kid in my elementary school and stuff like that. And then in high school, I've known like two, and so it's like, you know, as much as people want to pretend, you know, 'Oh, I'm like...I'm equal. And like I'm not racist at all.' It's like you still, like when you're not exposed to a race, you feel uncomfortable around that race. And so, [...] as much as I hate it and I want to be equal, it's like I sometimes feel uncomfortable around Black people 'cause I never see them. And it's like, I forget that they exist sometimes because it's like just out of my life. And so, it's like if you see a Black person in a store and they start talking to me, I'm a little bit more uncomfortable than if a white old man is talking to me. Although it's very uncomfortable either way, but it's like, you know, it's just those little things that we don't want to admit that's just, it's happening.

This attitude was also characterized by East and South Asian American students who frequently mentioned the importance of diversity and/or the lack thereof as they were not exposed to many opportunities to interact with races other than Asians or whites. When asked about who they meaningfully interact with on a daily basis, Nikhil reflectively responded, "I guess I don't have that many... I don't have Black friends. Damn...that's cold" (interview, 11/26/2019). A sophomore Indian male student, Pradeep, shared how he rarely had the chance to build relationships with Black and Brown peers, let alone interact with them. He said, "I know a lot of Asian students. Since our school isn't that much really diversified, I only know like two or three Black kids, but I don't really know that many Latino students. Maybe like one or two" (interview, 11/27/2019).

While Asians have always faced forms of discrimination that are unique to the group, due to their segregation from Black and Brown peers, they are insulated and shielded from "anti-Blackness." C. J. Kim (2018) posits that "white supremacy has pushed them down, and anti-Blackness has provided the floor beneath which they cannot fall, which is to say, even the worst-

off Asians—those burdened by refugee status, lack of citizenship, poverty, language barriers, and more—enjoy the boon of being not Black in an anti-Black society” (C. J. Kim, 2018, p. 226).

Literature has demonstrated the awareness of Asians regarding the cost of being a Black individual, due to which they tactically choose to distance themselves from Blackness, which subsequently manifests as forms of anti-Blackness. Though they may never be white, they know that they must separate themselves from being Black. Asians view their race as significant in terms of being the “next best alternative” as their understanding of being Black in America is nothing but a disadvantage at every turn. In an era of heightened racial reckoning, the youths in my study did not overtly and tactically choose to distance themselves from Blackness. Rather, they were already immersed in a system that is deeply committed to separate accommodations based on race.

However, given the relative privilege and unique racial footing of Asians, they were forced to hold on to strategies that allowed them to preserve in terms of their status. The school practices entrenched in anti-Blackness offered EA and SA students a sense of security, compelling them to believe that they ought to be “grateful because they have it better than most minorities” as “things could be much worse” for non-Asian communities of color (fieldnotes, 1/3/2020). As such, Asian youths demonstrated docility and passivity towards the unfair treatment of their darker-skinned counterparts using an attitude of “innocence.” Though the indifference and innocence of the Asian youths may initially appear neutral, the silence they share played an important role in perpetuating and maintaining their anti-Blackness. This is exemplified by an incident I witnessed while having lunch with Clara at her table near the concourse like any other day.

During lunch period, Clara and I joined her friends, Ji Soo Hwang, two white girls, and a Black girl who were already at the table eating their packed lunch. The last to join was a white girl named Mia. She held a papier mâché that resembled Blackface—shaped as a human head and colored in pitch black paint with bloodshot eyes and ears carved in. I had to think twice before recognizing the model as Blackface before freezing out of confusion, knowing not how to respond. I started cringing and wincing in embarrassment, observing Mia as she sat down at the table, picked up the sculpture, and started fidgeting with it. The girl sitting next to her asked her what the sculpture was, to which she responded, “It’s a head,” before throwing it into the air and catching it in her arms. The girl seated on her right started taking a video of Mia “playing” with the Blackface sculpture. Then, she started punching into it and slamming it down on the table with great force. The girls had now started to notice the sculpture, with one of them pointing at the red eyes it had. She may have been disturbed by the contrast between the two colors. Mia responded, “It’s a robber. I made it in my sculpture class, it’s made out of newspaper and plastic wrapped over it to secure it, and black masking tape wrapped around.” I was able to tell that the other two white girls who were listening to her quickly realized something as one of them told Mia, “It’s racist.” She shot back, “It’s not racist.” The two girls glanced my way with reddening faces as they gauged my response to the scenario. One covered her mouth with her hand while the other reached for a large scrap of the sculpture that had disassembled from the continuous slamming and hid it underneath the table.

I was horrified by the events unfolding in front of me, particularly because Kaia, the only Black girl at the table, had her eyes fixed on the food she was eating, soulless and stoic. At first, it appeared as though she was not especially bothered by it, but it was clear to me that she was demonstrating a numbness that comes with years of building tolerance toward such pain.

Quickly, Mia changed course and argued that it was a ski mask that she had made, rather than a racist portrayal of Black people, all the while slamming it onto the table. After this, she said that it could even be used as a boxing glove and thrust her hand in to punch it from within. The sculpture ripped and was destroyed while it was being tossed in the air. While I was shocked by this event, my interest in wanting the girls to let me sit with them prompted me to feign ignorance although I immediately felt shame for not taking any action and feeling the need to be a “neutral” observer (Green, 2014). Eventually, as the two girls who had accused Mia of racism had left the scene, I was disgusted by my passivity, realizing that I was in no position to blame others in situations where people stayed silent the entire time. (fieldnotes, 10/11/2019)

Students’ complacency, sense of entitlement, and status quo-supporting beliefs come from the lack of a need to locate their privilege on the same map as Black suffering due to their racial insulation and middle-class status. Although they are not fully protected from racism, they are sufficiently safeguarded to be positioned with relative privilege and leverage to practice complacency in the role of neglecting and/or perpetuating anti-Blackness. With their racial standing as those who are “innocent” or “passive” towards racism in the Black-White binary, Asians were “let off the hook” in terms of stabilizing their passive facilitation of racism. Many times, most Asian students were even aware of the extent to which anti-Blackness harmed minoritized groups and manifested in the inequities they continued to face. Zee An, a Chinese American female student in the twelfth grade spoke about how Asians were often times shielded from being labeled racist,

...even within the Asian community, we can be pretty racist towards other minorities. Um, I won’t give any specific examples, but there are people in the Asian community who are especially Islamophobic or super racist towards Black people, even though they’re like, ‘I’m not racist.’ And then they go like, “But...” and it’s like the most annoying thing ever...And I think because we’re also minorities ourselves, Asians are shielded from the criticism of being racist. Like, ‘Oh I’m a minority, I can’t be racist.’ Oh

no, you can still be pretty racist. Like some of my friends had pretty racist parents... Oh God, I've had so many late-night discussions with my dad about like not saying certain things 'cause they're pretty racist. He's like, 'I'm not racist.' Uh, it's, I don't like to admit it. They just like, 'Oh I respect the Blacks.' The Blacks. What the, what does that mean? Ugh. There's a lot of repressed anger for me.

Students' Negligence Toward Issues of Race

Due to the insulation formed by their sociocultural environs and middle-class standings within the school, East and South Asian youths were tuned out, not necessarily by choice in most cases, of the inequities and injustices they were or were not aware of. For example, none of the East Asian and South Asian American participants in this study were aware of the school's disciplinary policies and actions or the existence of the discipline room and the in-house suspension room located on campus, while most students were at least generally aware of the issue of racial profiling in the hallways. Pradeep stated, "That's an issue that a lot of people brought up actually. I think Black and Brown kids think it's unfair that they get stopped more often than, like, white kids or Asian kids" (interview, 11/27/2019). However, their distant awareness did not concern them as such racial injustice did not appear to directly affect them. A vignette from an interview with Diya depicts his negligence toward issues of race and racism, which, he believes has not affected him:

I feel like it may be a problem, but I'm just put in the dark of it. Like I understand that that is a very big problem, but I haven't experienced it. I haven't seen it too hard anywhere. Obviously, there's like the radical news stories, but ... there's a radical like news stories about like KKK marches and stuff like that. But yeah, I haven't personally experienced it or seen it happen... I feel it [racism] is real. Just not affecting me... Nothing too extreme. Like I know there's a lot of stuff that happens here, but I try to stay in the dark about it. More or less because, um, number one, I don't know where to get the information because like I'm not much social media and the ones that I am on, I don't have a very big presence on them other than Reddit, but Reddit's like anonymous social media, so, yeah. [...] It's not that I exactly stay away from it, it's just that I don't access it consciously.

In the interview, Zee spoke about the issues of racial inequalities that she had witnessed. She admitted to being “desensitized” to the issues that affect the minoritized groups of students at the school. When asked how she made sense of an incident where one of the security officers at a nearby school gave a lesson on why they should not be addressed using the N-word, she responded, “Oh, I think they’re ridiculous. I don’t care. If it doesn’t affect me personally, I don’t care.” She also expressed that she was disinterested in knowing about other racial scandals at her school. She disclosed how she is typically unaware of the things that go on at her school, “I have no idea what’s going on in the school. I, like, half the time, I’m like, my eyes are covered, and my ears are- I can’t hear it. I cannot see.” When asked for clarification, she said “Yeah, maybe I’m just desensitized to some of these, some of these things are just happening so fast, so often that I’ve just, I’m just like, ‘Oh, there goes another Redstone scandal. Oh boy.’” I then asked her if she generally attempts to take action when she feels emotionally affected, to which she responded: “Yeah, I mean, especially in this case [race scandal at Redstone], I don’t know how I could take action, but I generally, as the description of myself, I am not very proactive. Oh, that’s not a good thing. Whoops. Oh no...” (interview, 4/25/2020).

Zee went into a sudden qualm about her passiveness, defending her inattentive attitude by expressing how she has a hard time believing that people can genuinely develop forms of empathy without having first-hand experiences:

People would say that people who weren’t personally affected by tragedies say like, ‘Oh my God, that’s so bad.’ I don’t believe them. I think it’s this, this gets too much, this gets too political...I think to a certain degree, statistics just becomes statistics. You can use them to back up your claims, but if you claim, if you’re, if you weren’t personally affected by it, but you claim to be still like righteously angry, then I think you’re just taking advantage of it.

She went on to defend her inactions by pushing against the act of “taking action” as a self-serving idea. “This is something I was thinking about, like, earlier—yesterday when I watched this one YouTube video, it was interesting. It was about how, like, the toxicity of humanitarian groups, like, how they can promote white saviors.” She was attempting to justify her position on the sidelines, arguing how the actions of those who are not directly involved must somehow stem from self-interest. It was her way of arguing that it is not her place to act against injustice on behalf of other oppressed groups.

Asian students selectively muted things that did not directly affect them, focusing only on the unfairness that they personally experience. There was a widely held belief that the school failed to ensure transparency and communication with students and families in the context of disciplinary procedures and incidents such as the STAR testing and the nude photo scandals, both of which made the headlines in the local news. However, Asian youths in the study were not actively invested in learning more about the social issues that were going on in the school. Zee said,

Well, I do care somewhat, but it's more like, um, you heard about the Dropbox incident [nude photo scandal], right? Yeah. It's a distant anger. It's like, why would you do this? Why is this? Oh, you know, but because none of my friends were in the Dropbox or like, I wasn't in the Dropbox, it doesn't affect me directly, so I don't feel as strong of an emotion. It's just the, it's kind of like that um, the newspaper anger, like you see something in the newspaper and you're like, 'Oh my God, this is so distant from me, but I'm so angry. You know? If I say that I'm actually furious, I will be lying. I would be disingenuous, but I am upset over it.'

Internalization of Reverse Discrimination

The students in my study were mainly concerned about the “discriminatory” practices that made them feel that they were at a disadvantage and excluded from receiving greater support for their academics. For example, the school's lack of transparency discouraged Nikhil, a

sophomore Indian American student and a student leader in the Debate Club and Forensics, from trusting the school administrators. In his interview, he expressed feeling indignation toward the admins, who failed to “be more transparent with the student body” by “releasing the budgeting report for the school” (interview, 11/26/2019). He was upset that his debate club could not attend the nationals because the school would not financially support the academic clubs. While he understands why the administration opposes the idea of families having to cover the expenses due to issues of equity, he failed to comprehend why the school could not support them when the football team is constantly swarming with funds and donations. Nikhil went on about how the school should be financially responsible for the travel expenses if the administrators are truly concerned about the equitable outcomes of students who are academically driven as well as the minorities on campus. Nikhil felt Redstone was an affluent school that prevented racial and economic minorities to access its seemingly abundant resources (Lewis-McCoy, 2014).

Nikhil: If we had more of it, we’d probably go to national-level tournaments. I’ve been advocating for that, but we obviously don’t have the budgeting required to make that happen.

Joan: Wouldn’t the parents pay for some of the cost?

Nikhil: Well, actually, we tried to do that but the team ... the administration brought up equity reasons and how since kids can’t make it there ... That’s not our fault. I guess as a parent I’d be like, “I’m trying to advance my children’s success. I feel bad for this poor kid not being able to go but again, that’s not my problem.” It’s just like, why? It’s up to the school to service that, not the parents. I think that can be changed. That was a rumor I heard last year when kids were trying to do that, I can’t confirm if that was true, but I would believe it with how trash this administration is.

Joan: What you’re saying is that since schools wouldn’t let parents pay because of equity reasons, then the school should be the one paying for you guys to go to nationals?

Nikhil: Yeah, [inaudible] equity reasons, right? Nobody really cares about equity. We live in a society today where capitalism... Jeff Bezos makes enough to service half the economy, of course, it doesn’t matter.

Nikhil’s demands for greater transparency were not simply concerned with the financial support for academic clubs that wished to compete in major competitions. Nikhil believed that

academic clubs that are predominantly Asian are being cheated by a system that is far from being transparent and equitable. He explained that his bitterness was rooted in his strong hate of “reverse discrimination” (interview, 11/26/2019) which seemed to be based on his skewed understanding of affirmative action practices. Thus, the school’s lack of transparency in its managerial decisions and processes that focus on serving all students, including the high-achieving students, led Nikhil to conclude that “nobody really cares about equity, so why would I care about equity.” The students felt that the school was doing a poor job in winning over not only the low-performing students of color and victims vulnerable to sexual violence but also the high-performing students of color. Nikhil believed the school had allowed Asian students to fall through the cracks.

“Let’s Focus on Class, Not Race”

Those who voiced the concerns about the perceived discrimination and disadvantages faced by Asians often brought up the contentious debate around affirmative action and how it adversely impacts Asian communities the most. Many students in my study believed that they were not on an equal footing with other students of color in terms of their academic assessments. The belief that affirmative action should focus on class rather than race was a popular notion shared among Asian and white students. Nikhil shared in his U.S. government class, “Unless we don’t focus on class, we will be thinking that Black and Brown people are undeserving” (fieldnotes, 1/7/2020). James also shared his opinion on shifting the focus of affirmative action from race to class in order to “take the blame away” from those who are regarded as benefiting from the advantage of being racially marginalized.

Um, I think ... I’m not totally against affirmative action. I’m not an expert on it either. But I think the best, like from what I’ve been told, it’s focuses on race. What I think it should be more focused on is social, like socioeconomic standing and like, because one, it wouldn’t really affect a lot. I feel like because like the majority of poor people in

America are predominantly like Black and Hispanic people. And like if we focus more on social economic, like it would still be benefiting them. I feel like it could also like take a lot of blame away because I feel like a lot of people who don't like affirmative action are like so about like, 'It's like reverse racism and it's like discriminatory.' But like it's, it's more based on like creating advantages for students who have been disadvantaged. So, I feel like if you make it more focused on like, like how rich you were or how poor you were, like people wouldn't say that it's racist more based on like creating an advantage for students who have been marginalized.

However, James' argument that affirmative action is only a quick fix to the historical racial injustices was founded on his understanding that Black and Brown communities were "undeserving."

I think those kinds of attitudes wouldn't change that much. 'Cause I feel like that's like a lot of what people are saying about affirmative action like right now. But I think, I think that like, again, I feel like affirmative action, it's good, but it's like at the end of the day it's like going to be a band-aid to like a flesh wound. I think that we need like, I guess like we need a mindset shift as well, on top of like other things like affirmative action. 'Cause if we [don't] have this mindset shift, we won't be thinking that they're undeserving or whatnot.

Nikhil agreed with James on this subject, given the premise that affirmative action should focus on individual character rather than structural or macro-level forces that lead to institutional constraints that disproportionately affect racial minorities. He had established a misconstrued idea rooted in the deficit view that Blacks are undeserving minorities while also being the primary beneficiaries of affirmative action.

I feel like affirmative action should not be race-based as it enforces deficit ideology. Right? If you're giving Black people a distinct advantage just because they're Black, that's basically deficit ideology, but framed differently. I believe income-based affirmative action should be a thing because that's the amount of resources you have, but I don't believe in race-based affirmative action.

These assertions against race-based affirmative action were based on the premise that race-conscious policies and practices eventually hurt Asians in the context of college admissions and scholarship opportunities. Nikhil continued to speak about how he did not believe in the SAT adversity score, which allegedly end up negatively affecting Asian Americans. To him, it

was a known fact that East and South Asian students score higher on standardized tests than other racial groups and, therefore, Asians are hurt the most by race-based affirmative action.

I mean I don't know, in the 21st century I feel it's evolved to Indian and Chinese people, on average, I don't know, I've said this multiple times, scoring higher on standardized tests. I feel like that's a good way to put it without being like extremely condescending on other races, including white, Black, Hispanic/Latino. Yeah, which is also where affirmative action comes in and a bunch of other stuff comes in. Like the SAT adversity score, which is high-key bullshit because it ruins Asian Americans.

It is striking how Nikhil reasoned that race-based affirmative action is underpinned by the validity of the model minority stereotype and that such policy aims to restrain Asian success.

According to him, Asians are punished and “ostracized” for being “smart” (interview, 11/26/2019) even though scoring higher on tests was supposed to be praiseworthy in this supposedly meritocratic system. What follows is a vignette from Nikhil's interview:

I think you can't classify it [model minority stereotype] as good or bad. It's a stereotype that exists. It's a stereotype that's subconsciously exists. I mean obviously there are pros and cons to it. The cons are that obviously it's a stereotype and if you don't conform to that stereotype, you might be ostracized from your community. But is it bad to be smart? That's like the real question, right? Is it bad? Like of course at the beginning, how the model minority stereotype started ... because it was something about Chinese rail[way] workers conforming to expectations. That was a bad thing, right? But today it connotatively means that they score higher on tests. Is that necessarily a bad thing besides getting I guess kind of bullied about it? You're scoring higher than everyone. You should feel good about that, but it does have severe negative impacts in the college admissions scheme. I feel like the model minority stereotype is why we have race-based affirmative action rather than red lining or other things, which are what people who support race-based affirmative action say.

Diversity vs. Academic Rigor

The youths in my study were segregated from Black and Brown youths by mechanisms of tracking and afterschool activities. While both the youths and teachers voiced their concerns regarding the lack of diversity, it is important to view how diversity is taken up differently across students. Despite the support James demonstrates for the need to ensure greater diversity to

foster an all-inclusive environment, he expressed diversity as a concept that is dispensable and trivial for the academic success of students. He failed to regard diversity as a factor that could encourage not only students of color but also *all* students to thrive academically and socially in an equitable learning environment.

I think ... depends on like, depends on like how you measure success. Is diversity important for like academic success, for like the majority of students? I guess no, like it's not really like necessary, but like is it important for like fostering an environment that's good for everyone in the school? I think so. 'Cause I feel without diversity, there's going to be students that are left behind and even if like the school itself like looks better, it's not going to be the best place for all students.

During an interview with James, he casually mentioned that he thought diversity made the school look less competitive and marketable. To him, diversity did not necessarily translate as an asset and strength that made the school desirable and reputable. While students had an elusive understanding of diversity as an ideal to be pursued by the school, it did not yield the competitive edge that white students did.

I think it's because ... I think a lot of it is because they constantly get into controversies about these kinds of stuff. Like we had this whole thing about like the STAR testing and I'm not like the perfect source about it, but like apparently like a bunch of minorities were like targeted for with like ... something like with STAR testing. So, they constantly get into these like controversies and it's like having this reputation of being really equitable is becoming especially more important. So, I feel like they want to have this like dual perspective of being like really academically successful but then also being like an equitable place and they feel like those two can be like in contradiction sometimes.

Diversity as Ghettoization

While Amy Kim emphasized how diversity is mutually beneficial for both students of color and white students, she unconsciously revealed how exposure to diversity will help her transition seamlessly into colleges that are more “ghetto” due to the greater diversity relative to places such as Redstone High. Simply put, to her, diversity led to the ghettoization of schools.

She also saw it as a means to become acclimated to the diversified institutions that await her if she were to pursue higher education.

Yeah, Lincoln High School is like the whitest middle school in the area. So, [...] it wasn't really big shocker to me when I've moved to Redstone High. But, um, I know that like the other high school is much more diverse. So, another thing, a benefit that you have when you go to a school that's more diverse is that like, you get to experience more things with different culture. And I think you...you're more used to it. So, it kind of readies you for like the real world versus like, when you're at an all-white school after you graduate and you go to like a college, I'd be like, 'Oh my gosh, like I'm in the ghetto.' You know? So, like, I think like there's also benefit to being out of school with more diversity.

This argument was also backed up by her earlier statement during the interview, where she referred to Latinx and Mexican students hanging out together as “ghetto.” She said, “They talk about like ghetto and I’m like, um, the, Latin kids, there are a lot of... all the Mexican kids hang out with each other. ‘Like the Mexican kids are so weird’” (interview, 1/21/2020).

Conclusion

The pathologization and criminalization of marginalized Black and Brown youths made their positioning at the bottom of the racial ladder quite apparent at Redstone High School. The reality of white privilege remains undeniable due to the differential treatment and discrimination of non-white young people. Whiteness is accompanied by an array of advantages, and the proximity of the East and South Asian American students to such whiteness allowed them to be willfully ignorant of racial inequities. Lastly, Black and Brown youth were not only segregated by surveillance and discipline policies but also through tracking, based on underlying assumptions of aptitude and intelligence along racial lines.

Chapter Four: Negotiating the Model Minority Stereotype

This chapter examines how East and South Asian youths' schooling experiences shape the ways in which they make sense of the model minority stereotype. Asian American youths in the study were aware that they are racialized as math geniuses, nerds, and geeks in alignment with the dominant story of the model minority. Analyzing the ways they negotiated with such stereotypes provided insights into how they primarily have three goals—delivering exceptional academic performances with an end goal of being placed in reputed colleges, gaining acceptance from teachers, and fitting in with their social peers. To gain recognition in both academic and social realms and acquire all-around high status, those who had internalized the model minority identity gave way to the hegemonic racial project. Although the youths exerted their agency and strategic control by reinforcing the model minority stereotype, their compliance-oriented behaviors helped them secure greater opportunities and teachers' acceptance, thereby enabling them to freely navigate through the educational system. The diverse processes by which the youths negotiate and assume the model minority identity provided greater understanding and insights into the precarious nature of the Asian identity. Regardless of the youths' acceptance of the model minority stereotype, their schooling experiences were heavily shaped by the dominant narrative surrounding Asians and revealed the contradictions and struggles with which the Asian youths had to contend.

Model Minority as a Default Identity

The model minority stereotype is almost viscerally and immediately linked to Asian Americans. Oftentimes, students are impelled to put on the smart Asian image even before being afforded an opportunity to examine their subliminal processes of cultural affirmation and identity development. Notably, embracing the smart Asian stereotype became an essential part for young

people to reconcile with when exploring what was it that being considered an authentic Asian truly entailed. The model minority was viewed as a default identity embedded into the pan-ethnic Asian identity.

Students often lamented how they are left with no choice but to embrace the model minority identity owing to the ascribed labels and the concomitant expectations forced upon them and other Asian Americans. Amar Bari, an Indian American female student in 10th grade, expounded on how Indian Americans occupy a unique position among Asian Americans, adding that they need to prove that they're Asian "because you know you're in this limbo where you're not white, you're not Black, you're not Brown, you're Asian" and hence, "embracing the model minority identity becomes...enforced a little bit" (interview, 11/22/2019). In the following example, Sarah, another Indian American female student in 10th grade, also talked about how she was compelled to reluctantly take on the "smart Indian" persona.

I'd say I'm just like someone who puts myself out there... people know I'm Indian. I make sure to let them know. Like there's usually people confuse me as like Hispanic and stuff. And I'm like, 'Oh no, no, no, that's, no, that's not me.' I'll make sure I tell them; I'll sometimes make jokes about myself. I'll be like 'IT Support. Yup. I'm here. I got you.' You know, 'cause I do know stuff about that, so I'll be like, 'Yeah, I'm here to help you. I'm your smart Indian friend.'

The sociocultural expectations forced them to embrace the smart Asian stereotype, particularly in certain interactions and contexts where they were expected to persuade others that they were indeed Indian *and* Asian. Experiencing invisibility from the erasure of their ethnic background and culture solidified youths' reasons to accept and embody the model minority stereotype to mitigate further misrecognition and discrimination as Indian Americans. From early on, students were socialized to acquiesce to the prevailing model minority stereotype in order to gain acceptance as true Asians. Due to Indian youths' underlying view of others as being

ignorant and lacking knowledge of their ethnic roots and culture, they were more accepting of this model to reinforce their identity as Asian and by extension, Indian.

Moreover, the data suggested that the dominant discourse around Asians as the model minority and the flat portrayals of the cultural diversity of Asians stifled crucial opportunities for East Asian and South Asian students to meaningfully engage in sense-making of contradicting discourses and conflicting duality (Cammarota, 2016; Du Bois, 2007) and an opportunity to build oscillating narratives (Duke et al., 2008) that shape their robust racial and social identities. Amar was curious to know how her Indian friends would make sense of the model minority identity and whether they would even consider themselves Asians. At a later stage in the interview, Amar also asserted how Indian American students are deprived of meaningful opportunities to contend with their ethnic and racial identities because they are to embrace a simpler portrayal of themselves and the Asian American pan-ethnic identity.

Amar: Um, so I think it was Sarah I was talking about, I made a comment about like, 'Oh wow, you guys are really, really smart.' And then Sarah jokingly, she said, 'Yeah, because we're Asian, right?' And so, it seemed like, because from, you know, those comments or responses I've never knew that you guys were a bit confused when it comes to checking what you identify as. And I from observing the boys too, like Indian boys, they really have embraced the model minority identity.

Joan: Yeah.

Amar: Yeah. And so, I'm just trying to understand this dynamic of like, 'Yes, like we're Asian and we have this model minority stereotype. We're going to embrace it' versus like, 'Oh, sometimes I don't know if I'm Asian, like and people don't even see us [Indian Americans] as Asian.' So, like I don't even...

However, she contended that Asian Americans find it less arduous to accept and internalize the model minority stereotype. This is attributed to the fact that society typically considers this model benign and favorable. Although Amar is now one of the toughest critics of the model minority stereotype, she explained how espousing the smart Asian image came quite

naturally for her in elementary school and she was accepting of the smart Asian stereotype without giving much thought because being smart is seen as a virtue.

But I feel like a lot of people don't want to think about it, 'Hey, they think I'm really smart. All right, fine. I'll embrace it.' 'Cause I used to think about that too when I was little, I wanted to think I was a really smart kid and I was like, 'Yeah, I'm a really smart kid.'

Model Minority Stereotype as (Partial) Truth

Students construct identities by drawing on from disparate schooling experiences that are shaped by historical, institutional, and sociocultural forces (Gee, 2000). The majority of EA and SA youths, regardless of whether they (un)consciously believed or rejected the model minority stereotype, participated in performing and living up to the stereotype. While some of these students felt they were forced to give in to the underlying dominant narrative of Asian Americans, others actively endorsed the prevailing stereotype. Asian American youths' attitudes toward the model minority stereotype were divided largely into four groups. In the first group were those who uncritically accepted or were seen outwardly indifferent towards the model minority stereotype who represented elusive consent to hegemony. They saw themselves as minorities and saw academic achievement as a way towards social and economic mobility. The second group were those who were critical of the model minority stereotype. They saw education as an institution in which allowed them to gain greater capital and position to resist and combat social inequalities. The third group was quite receptive to the narrativized discourses and sought out to perform the model minority identity. The fourth group, most of whom were Indian American boys in the debate team, regarded the stereotype as accurate and grounded in reality. These youths were going beyond performing the "model" behavior to prevent them from being discriminated against for their minoritized status; their internalization of the stereotype provided them with the means to claim that Asians are mostly "smart" and "hard-working." Dhruv Nair,

an Indian American male student in the 9th grade, conceded that although the model minority is only “a stereotype,” he added that it “works out” because “Asians are smart” (interview, 2/14/2020). He reiterated, “That's a stereotype but a lot of Asians are still smart.” Jane Yang, a Korean American female student in the 10th grade, also explained why she believes such stereotype holds water,

I think...there's a reason why stereotypes exist, you know? So, I feel like one of the things is a lot of Asian parents' kind of expect their kids to be overachievers, like to really do well. So really that's something ... not all Asian kids work hard, but I know a lot do. There's a pretty good chunk of Asian kids who work really hard and are really good academically.

The pervasive viewpoint of Asians being considered “smart” gave students the agency to tout their self-proclaimed superiority above all other racial groups with respect to their academic standing. While Asian youths could never achieve whiteness through their non-white identities, their academic performance placed them closer to their white counterparts and/or even superior to them in their eyes. In particular, some Indian Asian students asserted their academic competence as exceeding those of all other racial groups and opined that they genuinely deserved high marks and greater educational opportunities which will eventually help them secure a bright future. Asian exceptionalism not only defined their identity but also became a device that ostensibly positioned themselves above others. Once these students fully internalized the model minority stereotype, Asian exceptionalism became an ideological weapon for them to look down upon others. In the following vignette, Nikhil Comar, an Indian American male student who is also in the 10th grade, argued that the model minority stereotype has been proven scientifically validated while he attempted to offset his anti-Black imagery within the same sentence.

What sets me apart from [others is] my... is DNA. Okay, this is a very scientific answer, but my DNA, my skin color. But besides that, during this interview, I've been talking about how there are certain subconscious model minority stereotypical things that I guess may set me apart from other races. Of course, I mean ... I don't know. How do you say

this without being offensive but there have been arguments that have been made that basically conclude that the model minority stereotype in some way or essence in the 21st century as of now is correct, as in if you compare the average Asian American and the average African American, the Asian American is, I don't know, academically more successful but the African American is athletically more successful? That could be, I guess, a social construct but I don't know. I seem to believe it because from what I've seen with my eyes it seems to be true.

Educational Investment that Sets Asians Apart

Many of the Asian students deemed their Asian peers as more or less fitting to the model minority stereotype, which made them believe in Asian exceptionalism. Some were critically aware of the negative ramifications of these stereotypes on non-Asian minority groups. However, according to the majority of my youth participants, it did not change the fact that Asians are still “smart” and industrious. Furthermore, most believed that Asians’ strong cultural commitment to education and academic success was a factor that gave them an academic edge over others.

Pradeep Agarwal, an Indian American sophomore who’s a close friend of Nikhil, said the following,

East and South Asian Americans? I think the whole value that's education is really important. It's commonly shared between like all of Asia. I haven't literally seen any family who doesn't really care about education, like everyone should be caring about education of the children and stuff.

According to Pradeep, the immigrant families’ strong educational commitment had carried over to the U.S. since “the education system in a lot of Asian countries is a lot harder” (interview, 11/27/2019). One of the Chinese American students’ parents also mirrored this notion and chimed in on how Asians’ advantages are rooted in strong “education, work ethic, and the family values” which helps to push Asians “to be more successful” (interview, 11/9/2019). He contended,

...People often say, Asians are good at math. I don't know whether Asian is good at math, but we are good at education. That is the more important part. I don't know why really. I

think that's a really big grand question. Why we are so into education? I feel like, uh, maybe you are born this way, or I learned from my parents and we learned that it's actually with a good reason that makes you more successful and more important and makes you a better person.

The Economic Return of Internalizing the Model Minority Stereotype

Performing the model minority identity had opened greater opportunities for Asian youths to successfully navigate and maneuver through the education system. Students and their families' pursuit of private interests made it difficult to reject the model minority subject's prevailing neoliberal logic as well as the meritocratic system in competitive school culture (Demerath, 2009). Indian American boys were committed to living up to the model minority stereotype which gave them the entitlement to deftly navigate through the school system. The Indian boys considered themselves ingenious for leveraging their status as top performers within the school. They strongly viewed themselves as those who "helped to boost the school's reputation" of being one of the "best performing schools in the state" (interview, 1/10/2020) and took pride in it. Besides yielding symbolic exchanges, the investment into the aforementioned model also increased materialistic returns and structural opportunities for Asian youths. The Indian youths learned to be economical with the stereotype.

"Finessing"

Among the study's participants, achievement-oriented Indian American youths were heavily invested in the sociocultural practices which they referred to as "finessing." The frequently used term was ubiquitously understood as a way of working "smart" in whatever ways possible toward a set goal through maneuvering the schooling system. "Finessing" was largely adopted by Indian boys who had honed and implemented their language use, interpersonal skills, and a unique ability to maximize benefits from their interactions with social institutions (Lareau, 2003) so as to work efficiently rather than simply work "hard." Dhruv explained how "finessing"

is one of the many ways in which he navigates the school system to accomplish his academic goals.

...Yeah, a lot of people do that. Like for like honors social studies, I didn't finish my Venn diagram, so I told my teacher like, I need like another day. He was like, 'Sure.' But yeah, they like really make a difference 'cause, you know, he was talking about how it's, you know, a hard deadline but like, I didn't get it done and I couldn't print it. So, I just asked him for another day, and he was okay with it. So, I guess I kinda like finesse that project and it was really good.

In a culture that glorifies achievement and good grades as paragons of virtue, one's energy and "strategies of action" (Swindler, 1986) are to be oriented toward doing whatever it takes to achieve more and/or perform better than others and to maximize results. Asian students had adopted an understanding of working smart as trying "to end the fastest with the least amount of effort" in a system where one cannot get ahead by simply "working hard" (interview, 1/10/2020). The neoliberal practices in school had shaped how youths interpreted and replaced the meaning of hard work with the idea of efficiency and lean working. Working efficiently which could not be equated to or used interchangeably with learning efficiently and effectively, comprised a major part of how Ishaan Dhar, a sophomore Indian American male student, approached his academic work. Ishaan and his Indian friends were zealously invested in "finessing" as such cultural performance and capital yielded them what Carter (2003) identified as "authentic' cultural status positions within their respective communities" (p. 138) and "bragging rights" along the way. When Ishaan was asked if Asian students are skillful in "finessing," he responded affirmatively.

Joan: In your opinion, do you think Asian students are deft at uh, are good at "finessing" than other students?

Ishaan: That's definitely what I was trying to get at, but I don't know if I got that or not, but I think that's true because like all Asian students that I know are like...trying to do the bare minimum amount of work to get an A.

When I asked Ishaan why that was so, he said,

‘Why is it Asians?’ I don't even, I'm not sure...the friends, the friends that I have, like the Asian friends that I have all do it. So today, just during lunchtime, one of my friends just sent an email to a teacher, like, there's an assignment that was due today and he's like, ‘Hey, uh, can I get an extension because I didn't finish it?’ He's, she's probably going to say, ‘Alright,’ like it's not that hard to just send email, but everyone else in the class, you know, turns it in on time then like a couple of Asians in the class, or the ones that didn't have time to do it, quote unquote, are gonna not turn it in because they have other opportunities to turn it in based on playing this game millions of times. So, I honestly, I'm not sure why it's Asians, but I know that it is Asians. And I don't want to say it's because they're smarter, because that's definitely not true. Because if they were smarter, they'd actually turn it in on time. But I don't know.

Ishaan and I continued our conversation, and he added weight to the notion that Asian students are more vulnerable to constructing strategies in earning higher grades than others, including their white counterparts. The following excerpt of the interview exemplifies how Ishaan regards Asians as resourceful in their ways of playing the game of school and excelling at it compared to how white youths would most likely respond in similar situations. Ishaan cited an example to explicate how white students would not need to “finesse” their way toward getting an extension to get a higher grade on an assignment, whereas an Asian student most likely would. Furthermore, Ishaan called attention to Asians’ superiority over the dominant group owing to Asian efficiency and the drive of Asians to achieve what they set their minds to.

Joan: Have you seen other non-Asian students finessing?

Ishaan: So, white students, so for example, there's this, there's this one assignment that, uh, for not me personally, but like another French class. So, um, one student is Asian, another student is white. So, the, the white student basically, he didn't finish the assignment and turned in an incomplete assignment and got a bad grade on it. And the Asian student, he didn't finish the assignment, send an email to a teacher and then talk to his teacher about why he didn't finish it, which is probably some random excuse, and then did the assignment and then turned it in and got 100% on it. So... even though the two started from the same place of not finishing the assignment, the Asian person ended up with a better score at the end because he was like, aloud and was able to talk to his teacher and quote unquote finesse his way to 100%. So, the question was, ‘have I seen it on other students?’ So, I definitely have seen it among other students, but it's more among like Asians as far as I can tell.

Ishaan posited that Asian youths had the know-how to take advantage of the teachers' underlying presumptions that Asians "always turn in good work" (interview, 1/10/2020). He believed teachers were willing to grant extensions or do-overs because Asians were presumed to produce "good work." Although he did not explicitly refer to non-Asian peers, his elucidation made it clear that he was aware of how non-Asians minorities were not granted the same opportunities that were made available to Asians. He explained how teachers had underlying biases that non-Asian minorities would "always turn in crappy work" even if they were given extensions.

- Joan: Do you think Asians get the benefit of the doubt?
 Ishaan: Yeah, for sure.
 Joan: Than the other students?
 Ishaan: Yeah, for sure. Because you always turn in good work. So, this one time when you couldn't do it? Why can't you just get a little extension and then you can turn in good work again?
 Joan: Hmm.
 Ishaan: If you always turn in crappy work, then why are you going to get an extension to turn in more crappy work is what the teacher—it's on the teachers' mind.
 Joan: Right.
 Ishaan: Because they're human beings as well.

Ishaan believed Asians have the "upper hand" because of the way the teachers presorted them as smart students who "produce good work." The Indian Asian youth was cognizant of how teachers' postulation of Asians' high work ethic played a role in placing higher expectations on Asian students, thus opening up more structural opportunities and resources offered to Asians (Chae, 2004).

I guess [it] kind of has a connection because teachers, I mean I've noticed, I think it might be the opposite, but the teachers, I think when they see an Asian American or an Asian person in general, they just expect them to do good work, or they assume that all the work they do is good work. So, it's kind of like an upper hand that we have...like subconsciously they might think about in the back of their head, 'Oh, this really smart person turned this in. So, this essay must be good' compared to 'Oh, this really dumb person turned them in, this essay must be bad.' Um, so I think it's very hard to erase those

when grading papers, which is why I think that a teacher... sees like an Asian student as, 'Oh, they're going to do good work' compared to, a teacher, for example, like maybe a white student who isn't that smart and gonna say, 'Oh, um, this person's work isn't usually good. Why is it going to be good this time?' or something like that.

Bourdieu (1984) would define “finessing” as habitus and the informal knowledge and skill that youths leverage as cultural resources to “decode and manipulate” (Apple, 2001, p. 415) the educational system in which the Indian boys are encouraged to marketize their ascribed model minority identity to make economic choices and use it to their own benefit. Apple (2001) explains how “ease,” “style,” and “confidence” which may be similar to “finessing,” are “the unseen capital that underpins their ability to negotiate marketized forms and “‘work the system’ through sets of informal cultural rules” (p. 415).

Social Prowess and the Conditions of Finessing

Ishaan used his interpersonal skills and reputable status as a model minority to interact with social institutions. As a case in point, he made a conscious choice to be socially savvy in persuading his teacher to give him a second chance to turn in a late assignment for a better grade. However, the ability to interact with adults within the power structure to achieve one’s goals entailed performing the model minority without disrupting the scripted narrative of Asians. Put differently, the practice of “finessing” was a convenient and efficient way of achieving one’s desired outcomes even if it involved subtle forms of persuasion and even deception, as long as the behaviors stay encircled within the boundaries that preserved the group’s formulated narrative. Asian youths witnessed how maintaining and reinforcing the model minority stereotype typically worked in their favor and would often earn respect from teachers (Dhingra, 2020). By internalizing the alleged Asians’ intrinsic smartness, the youths justified the privilege that allowed them to uninhibitedly navigate the school system. The youths’ role in maintaining the model minority identity validated their behaviors of deft maneuvering.

Among the Asian youths, Indian American boys were most heavily immersed in the game of finesse and were highly acute of the kinds of attitudes and behaviors that were esteemed and rewarded in spaces of learning. The model minority stereotype gave them the social standing to maneuver their way through getting their hands on what they wanted from the social institutions. Therefore, their proclivities to become obsequious to authority figures were rooted in their understandings of how opportunities manifested through race and power. Asian youths were deeply consumed by the discourses around smartness, respectability politics, and social acceptability wherein they possessed the know-how of presenting themselves in front of adults. Reinforcing the carefully curated narratives around them allowed them to navigate their academic and social worlds. This resembled the “academically smart girls” in Pomerantz and Raby (2011) study who regarded hard work and smartness “in order to further maintain their choices in both the present and the future” (p. 554). However, the Indian boys were far from being the true subservient model minority; they were exercising their agency to negotiate with authority figures to ultimately maximize their opportunities and gains. Nonetheless, the youths’ finessing led them to “acquire symbolic forms of recognition” (Carter, 2003, p. 139) from both adults and peers.

The tools of social dexterity such as circumspection and politeness worked within the boundaries of the model minority stereotype. To illustrate, several boys confided in me that as long as teachers are willing to be deceived even if they lack confidence in the integrity of the students, as long as they are told what they want or need to hear. Asian students were skillful in paying respect to authority figures only to the extent that allowed them to get access to and have their way with the school system. In such responsivity between the two groups, youths exerted their agency in influencing and persuading the authority figures by performing as submissive

beings, and the teachers once again exercised their power by putting the students in their place and by arranging them as the model minorities within the system.

Compliance with the Model Minority Stereotype

According to my research data, Indian American youths' agency in initiating strategic actions could be interpreted as a form of navigational capital (Yosso, 2005) that enables them to "maneuver through institutions not created with Communities of Color in mind" (Yosso, 2005, p. 80). The youths' "critical resistant navigational skills" (Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998, p. 216) are to be understood as tools that support them in moving through the institutions built on the edifice of structural inequality and racism.

While the concept of navigational capital reiterates the notion that Asian youths are immersed in a culture of "toolkit of habits, skills, and styles" (Swindler, 1986) from which they construct strategies of action to maneuver the school system, the term, "micro-interactional processes" (Lareau & Weininger, 2003) allows me to deepen my understanding of why individuals "comply or (fail to comply) with the evaluative standards of the dominant institutions" (p. 568). The concept of the micro-interactional processes in which "individuals' strategic use of knowledge, skills, and competence comes into contact with institutional standards of evaluation" (Lareau & Weininger, 2003, p. 597) lends credence to the arguments made around Asian youths' navigational and institutional strategies mentioned thus far.

I put forth an argument that Indian Asian youths' unique behaviors of compliance to gain acceptance from authority figures and flexibility in movements indicate their tacit participation in racial hegemony that nefariously preserves the neoliberal model minority logic. The data analysis revealed and complicated the processes in which Indian boys learned to negotiate the model minority to not only strategically and simultaneously express social prowess but also

exhibit behaviors of compliance-driven by tangible and intangible motivations to access better opportunities and resources. Moreover, the study also examined how the schooling experiences of South Asian youths informed them to meekly capitulate to the hegemonic devices of whiteness in a manner that enables them to maximize their inscribed racial privilege as model minorities. However, the youths' compliance did not stem from deference; instead, it is attributed to their sense of entitlement to flexibility and fluidity to navigate freely across the educational system.

Simply Taking Advantage of the System

Since Asian youths believed they were constantly put on a pedestal, they found “finessing” as an essential element of doing everything in their power to surpass others, especially their Asian and white peers. They felt as if such behaviors and attitudes were underhandedly “expected from them” (interview, 1/21/2020) because they are assessed on a higher academic standard than everyone else. Moreover, they did not view “finessing” and strategies of action as different from “cheating” or even “slacking off.” On the contrary, they merely saw these approaches as opportunities to take advantage of the situation where they were allowed to be nimble and insidious. In a way, they were resisting the “despair and hopelessness brought about by a limited opportunity structure” (Carter, 2003, p. 139). When James Yoon, a Korean American male student who is a part of Nikhil and Ishaan’s friend group, was asked to give examples of the hurdles and loopholes one would have to go through to work the system, he said,

Well, it's not even loopholes. Like what I would do is if I'm late on assignments or if I like get a bad grade, I just email the teacher or talk with them saying like, making up any dumb excuse. And then they would let me get away with like either redoing it or like having it late without any punishment.

The following vignette from Ishaan's interview elucidates how one might receive contradicting messages around "hard work" in a system that allows students to become opportunistic in traversing their way toward attaining the desired outcomes. As per Ishaan, "finessing" does not tantamount to cheating because the system simply authorizes them to do so. He believed Asian students are rightfully taking advantage of the system just as anyone driven by rational thought, economic efficiency, and strategic reasoning would. The system had allowed those with relative privilege to strategically navigate the system and achieve results by doing the bare minimum under the condition that they stay within their lane. Thusly, Asian youths evinced a strong desire for networks of people, opportunities, and instrumental support that afforded them the autonomy to exercise academic finesse and adroitness to seamlessly navigate the educational system under the condition that they do not deviate from the model minority script.

Joan: Are you saying that they are cheating the system to get...

Ishaan: I think the system... I think the system is cheating itself. I don't think anyone's cheating the system.

Joan: Say more.

Ishaan: Like... the system shouldn't exist to the point where you are allowed to do these things. Like, I think this system is just like shooting itself in the foot because I was saying that 'oh, grades are important,' but it's also saying that 'you don't need to work hard to get grades.' So, working—not working hard is important? Like is that what it's trying to tell us? Because you don't need to work hard to get grades, but yeah, grades are important. So, if you like equate the other two, you're not working hard is important, but that doesn't make any sense because obviously why would not working hard be important? So, I think the system is kind of contradicting itself when it gives us...or like classes in general and they give us an assignment and they tell us to do it and it was copied off to somebody else and we turn it in. Like that was important. What you just did there. It's basically telling us that where you just did there, that was important because doing that reflected in the grade book as getting an A. Does that make sense?

Joan: So let me get this straight. So, once you'd know how you navigate through the system....

Ishaan: Yeah, there's kind of going through a maze that you've already been in a million times.

Joan: So, are you saying there's a pattern and there are rules, but as long as you keep the rules and you like play along the game, you're going to probably win?

Ishaan: You're gonna reach the end.

- Joan: And so, so basically what you're saying is like how you navigate through the system easily is what's important in this game. And so that's really what you're going after rather than trying to learn something in the system.
- Ishaan: Yes, yes. How can you get from start to end the fastest with the least amount of effort is what people are trying or at least Asians in my opinion, are trying to accomplish. Because taking 18 courses like online, it's not going to help you do anything. The second you finish those courses, everything is going to go out of your brain. But then why are you taking those 18 courses? Because you want to look good on college applications.

Taking Learning into Their Own Hands

The students also performed the model minority to take further control of their own approaches and methods to learning. They mastered the act of “finessing” to benefit from their teachers’ perceptions as well as hopes to gain greater autonomy and flexibility in how they approached learning. For example, in the following conversation, Dhruv was convinced of how his practice of “finessing” enabled him to seek alternative ways of learning that better suit his needs and learning style. Such practice afforded him the autonomy to further explore personal interests and adapt multifarious modes of learning he found more engaging and meaningful.

...I mean teachers treat me fine and like they don't really treat me that much differently. But yeah, I can kind of like...I think a lot of my teachers, they think if I have a good idea of it, they just like, let me go off with it. It's like I can finesse a lot of work off that. In history, a lot of the time I don't do the notes, but my teacher knows I have the concept of it, and he knows that I got it, so he doesn't really care that I don't have the notes.

Resisting the “Nerd” Stereotype

My study participants were aware of the fact that the model minority stereotype implicated Asian youths are “nerds” and “geeks.” Sophia Kwan, a Korean American female student in the 12th grade, stated how “people think Asians are lame and nerdy and not athletic, smart, and ... they are a showoff kind of thing” (interview, 2/6/2020). Similarly, Diya Deep, an Indian American freshman, explained how the nerd groups largely comprised Asians with few white students sporadically included here and there.

I don't know how it works in the world, but you're always going to have your nerd groups, your not nerd groups. So, like, but in the nerd groups, often, like I said earlier, there's going to be a lot of Asians and Indians, but you'll have the white people there too uh, um, [who] are fully American...

Similar to the Chinese American boys in Goto (1997) who resisted academic achievement depending on the social circumstances, Indian male students' attempts in disrupting the nerd stereotype of Asians manifested as a response to racism and their struggle to present themselves as "likeable" among peers. While Farid, also a sophomore Indian American, pointed out the slim chance of try-hards being "popular," it was evident that he believed the try-hards and the nerds were archetypally seen as academically competitive who are less socially competent and desirable. While "hard work is valorized in neo-liberal discourses," it was still "a trait that is viewed as 'un-cool' in the school" (Pomerantz & Raby, 2011, p. 555).

A try-hard is, it's just like very academically competitive and you can, I guess, uh, try-hards, they're less cool. Like they can be cool. Like they can be chill, but like they'll kind of be like, 'Oh yeah, the grades are, the grades are like the prime objective of school.' So, like there, I think they'll tend to be like less popular a little bit. They can be popular for sure. But you know, people will be like, 'Oh that person's a try-hard' and that you know, that kind of just nags at people, I guess.

Within the school culture, Asians were commonly perceived as nerds who are diligent and hard-working subjects. Not to be confused with simply being labeled "smart," stigmatizing attitudes were inherent in the nerd stereotype. Within the Indian American boys' social circles, they displayed impression management behaviors and actively resisted the negative image that projected them as unlikeable or unsociable through "finessing." Notably, they also attempted to distinguish themselves from the prototypical Asian nerds who are unsociable and rigid in their ways.

The youths resisted the submissive stereotype by performing noncompliant behavior (Goto, 1997) carrying themselves as "mischievous subjects" or in the words of Ferguson (2000),

“naturally naughty” boys and exemplifying their social and gender prowess to be considered “cool” and consequently, “less Asian.” This type of behavior was commonly seen among the boys because the nerd image is commonly interlinked with emasculation faced by Asian American men and boys. Constructions of academically successful boys were feminized and therefore, they felt vulnerable in the contradictions where they could be made fun of their smartness just as easily as they could be praised (Pomerantz & Raby, 2011). Thus, Finessing was in a way, performative acts of gender (Butler, 1990) that guard themselves against the intersection of racial and gender discriminations. In a school culture where masculinity is constructed and supported through boys’ participation in competitive sports, Indian boys carefully negotiated their learner identities in relation to gender inequity. The youths’ complex identity construction and negotiation complicated the discursive representation of the “smart Asian,” without comprising their acceptance as “normal” (Butler, 1990, 1993) masculine boys and “subjects in their intelligibility” (Butler, 1995, p. 138).

The youths saw “finessing” as a way to gain “bragging rights” among their close-knit group of friends and greater acceptance from a wider range of peers outside of their community of practice. It was critical to suppress themselves from standing out as a showoff because the label of being “nerdy” was not devoid of negative repercussions. Within their close-knit friend groups, they encouraged each other to “finesse” to be socially accepted and rewarded for resisting the prudish and upright characteristics attributed to Asians. The cultural performances of finessing were an alternative way youths socially controlled one another, judged their self-worth, and maintained high self-esteem (Carter, 2003). These youths attempted to prevent any simmering chasms or hostilities that would cause others to build resentment and hatred toward them for being framed as smart and pompous. In fact, on several occasions, I observed how

Ishaan and his crew verbally attacked and ridiculed a Chinese American girl, sometimes behind her back and sometimes loud enough for her to hear, for her snobbish and judgmental attitudes toward others. Apparently, she gave Asians a bad name.

So, I think that if you're quote unquote, the smart one and you try to explain to everybody how you're smart, like, 'Oh, I'm so smart, look at me, I have A, I'm taking all these hard classes' and 'Oh, I have all these really amazing test scores' and 'Oh, I got...' then it definitely influences who's going to like you because no one's gonna like you if you're bragging to everybody and about what scores you got and what class you're taking it even though you're not directly saying, 'Oh, look how dumb you are. I'm thinking all these smart classes,' that's what you're implying. Like, 'Oh, I'm in all these smart classes. You're in this crappy math class.' Like, 'Oh, look how dumb you are.' So, I think if you are smart and, and you're Asian for example, because usually that's the stereotype associated and for some part, you know, it's kind of true, it influences how peers or your like likability factor, I guess, because it makes you more, um, seem like a jerk who seem, 'Oh, I'm taking all these hard classes.' ...I mean, but if you're really smart and you know, you kind of keep to yourself and you're a nice person, you talk to people, then definitely influences you—your likability in a positive way because people don't view you as that kid who's Asian and obviously is so smart and is bragging to everybody about their test scores, but rather the kid that, you know, does his own work, you know, talks to people, and doesn't treat anybody like they're less than them because I feel some of those people that, you know, brag about their scores, try and kind of treat other people like they're less than them. (interview, 1/10/2020)

Most South Asian students I interacted with at Redstone did not attempt to convince others of how much they were committed to their academics. As a matter of fact, they were more concerned in staging how successful they can finesse or maneuver through the school seamlessly. Again, among their peers, the Indian youths went out of their way to demonstrate the extent to which they are proficient in subverting teachers' power and control over them. Their shared practice of finessing and tactful behaviors revealed how they were "at ease" (Calarco, 2018; Khan, 2010) in getting their hands on what they wanted by undermining the structural elements (e.g., rules and authorities) of the school system. Again, they leveraged their racialized positioning as "good subjects" in manipulating the authorities to achieve their desired result *and*

appear as though they are at ease with everything without working too diligently to gain social acceptance from their peers.

I witnessed Indian American boys' resistance to the negative stigma of being identified as nerds through exercising their racialized privilege of having relative proximity to whiteness. The youths resisted the nerd stereotype through finessing although this type of practice entailed reinforcing the model minority identity. Finessing and seamlessly navigating the educational system without "being too Asian" (personal communication, 11/26/2019) was instrumental in resisting the nerd stereotype that negatively framed them as docile and passive. The attitudes and behaviors of finessing were about taking risks and exercising their privileges by pushing the boundaries of the model minority identity. It involved a calibrated balancing act of being "bad" and yet performing academically "well" simultaneously. They did so without being called out as deviating from whiteness, but the fact of the matter was that they were taking advantage of their relative privilege to conceal the pro-academic orientations that mark them as "too Asian." Therefore, embodying privilege and being at ease, especially when it comes to navigating through the system, were adopted behaviors of dismantling the stigmatized nerd stereotype. The youth's attitudes and behaviors stemmed from their yearning to fit in by distancing themselves from their "Asianness" to gain wider social acceptance. The following excerpt from my fieldnotes illustrate a particular pattern of attitudes and behaviors discussed so far.

In Ms. Johnson's English 10 class, the class went down to the computer lab in the library to work on their inquiry papers. Ishaan was sitting next to a white student and an Asian student. I was hovering over them to ask what they were working on. The white boy I met from a USGP [United States Government and Politics] class explained that they're working on an inquiry paper after having read dystopian novels of their choice. Ishaan suddenly brought up a conversation of how he had found a person who was willing to write his research paper for \$40. He said he had found the guy on Reddit. He showed us the email exchanges he had with the person, but he eventually could not follow through with his plan because he was afraid that his mother would find out. Ishaan's mother had access to his PayPal account and kept track of all of his purchases. I warned him of the

consequences of plagiarism. I told him how his decision might cost him his grade, and the boys nodded their heads in agreement. He changed the subject by opening his student portal and showed me that his lowest grade was a 92 in physics. He scrolled down through the grades he received for all his assignments and tests, and he pointed out that one of his teachers forgot to add his grade for a test. He said that he will wait and see if the teacher notices this until the end of the semester. His white friend from USGP class tells him that what he's doing is "risky" and that he's "living dangerously" because he would eventually have to go back to retake the test that's based on old materials. Over and over again, Ishaan attempted to portray himself as not much of a try-hard but a rebel. He often shows off how he can maintain all A's in his classes without working too industriously. (fieldnotes, 1/6/2020)

The youths pushed back on the stereotype of the Asian grind, suggesting that they see greater value in the validation of their academic performance based on intelligence rather than working diligently and "being too Asian." Since gifted and exceptional white students were placed at the top of the racial hierarchy, Asian students were willing to place themselves closer to their outperforming white peers. Despite being afforded with all-around high status, Asians learned that they would never acquire the highest social-status ranking attained by their white counterparts. Therefore, as second-class citizens, they wanted to further distinguish themselves from the nerdy Asians to position themselves closer to whites. Again, they did this through "finessing" which gave them the upper hand over the representative nerdy Asians who are considered smart but not likeable. Ishaan said,

So, it comes to the person in general and I feel like, it's not a talking point, but it's kind of a quote unquote bragging point. Like, 'Oh, you look on how much you studied for the test, and you failed.' You're like, 'I didn't even study at all, and I got a higher grade.' If you know what I'm talking about.

Among the Indian Asian boys who internalized the smart Asian stereotype, they strived hard to contest the negative trait of the docility myth by using their given "model" stereotype as a tool to finesse and undermine both power as well as the system, thus gaining social acceptability from their peers. Although the model minority discourse essentializes Asians as unsophisticated beings, the youths were far from being passive beings. They leveraged and

consumed the stereotype to leave no stone unturned in order to achieve their desired outcomes. Through the practice of finessing, they attempted to subvert the social forces that position them as second-class citizens. However, the Asian youths once again surrendered to the hegemonic order (Gramsci et al., 1971) to achieve whiteness through reproducing and reinforcing the model minority identity. Despite Asian youths' persistent efforts to disrupt the model minority and nerd representations, their response to racism against Asian Americans conclusively made it evident that they consented to hegemony and white dominance.

Asian youths' approaches to "finessing" are grounded in the strategic pursuit of whiteness rather than oppositional identities. These Asian youths were concerned with contesting the notion that they are nerds who are docile, obsessive, and lack social skills. Though these youths attempted to present themselves as deviant subjects who do not conform to the compliant Asian nerd image, they were disinterested in emulating and being framed as displaying "disruptive" and "deficient" behaviors that are associated with low-performing students of color. South Asian youths weren't actively resisting the stigma associated with the nerd stereotype to dismantle the assumption that they are any less smart. The circumstances that allow them to finesse reveal the ways in which schooling practices are arranged for Asian youths to desire whiteness and to give way to the systemic hegemony of white supremacy while seemingly trying to resist racism on the periphery.

My data unravel the precarious nature of the Asian identity. C. H. Kim (2009) argues how "Asian American identity takes shape in contradictory forms of both resistance and assimilation under the rule of neoliberal multiculturalism," (p. 52-53). My data analysis demonstrated the diverse ways in which Asian youths embraced the model minority identity through the tensions of having to internalize, negotiate, and negate the racialization processes.

The tensions and contradictions revealed thus far demonstrated how Asian youths “remain inconsistent subjects that want to identify with their established images as simultaneously denying them, for the course of becoming American ambivalently forces Asian Americans to both deny and desire their identity” (C. H. Kim, 2009, p. 53).

How the Model Minority Stereotype Shapes Youths’ Schooling Experiences

The rest of the chapter presents East and South Asian youths’ discussions around how the model minority stereotype shapes their schooling experiences. The chapter also focuses on the ways in which students express how they are aware of the ways the stereotype is taken up to ascertain the “educational arrangements that lock them into second-class citizenship” (Gillen, 2014, p. 27). My interactions with the Asian participants through frequent small talks and interviews made abundantly clear that they felt as though they are “singled out” as model minorities but are overlooked and “treated differently” (interview, 1/21/2020) than their white counterparts.

Overlooked and Overshadowed

An unintended aspect of being labeled as “smart” that rang the loudest across the Asian youths was that they often experienced a lack of academic help and support from their teachers. Sarah Devi, an Indian female student in the 10th grade, conveyed her inner conflict of being labeled “smart.” She enjoyed the recognition and esteemed academic reputation amongst her peers, but she felt as though her teachers were inattentive to her needs and mental state of feeling inadequate because she was identified as a member of a high-performing group.

They're like, ‘Oh Indian, let's make her do everything, lead everything ‘cause she's probably smarter than everyone else.’ So, like that was good for me obviously, but I kinda didn't like that. Yeah, ‘cause they were definitely didn't like put too much pressure on me ‘cause they're like, ‘She's got it’ but it's also kind of bad ‘cause they just assume I knew everything, when I kinda needed help. Like things like that. That was like definitely bad.

In general, most students voiced the concern of being overlooked by teachers. Even those who believe in the model minority stereotype spoke of this particular concern. Ishaan believed that his teachers were remiss and uninterested in his learning process and progress. He also argued that the lack of teachers' intervention and feedback on his work invigorated him "to take a shortcut" and "slack off" (interview, 1/10/2020) for good grades rather than doing his best. Being overlooked by his teachers led him to be less invested in his learning. Like Ishaan, those who participated in "finessing" claimed that they have lost their joy in learning because the school culture has become everything about academic performance, high-stakes testing, and curriculum standardization.

'Cause I feel like more and more of these days everything's about grades and whether you have good grades or not. So, just playing into that. It's like 'Do I actually want to learn those, or do I just want to get a good grade on it?' Because for example, in one of my classes, we get a homework assignment and the teacher stamps it if she sees that you did the homework assignment, but she didn't, she doesn't actually see if you did the homework assignment. So, you could copy the homework assignment from somebody else and then just turn it in or just show it to her and she's like, 'Yeah, that was good' and just stamp it. Or you get...write some random words on the paper and she'll see that you've had words on there and then she'll stamp the homework assignment. But what did you get out of that? You didn't get anything out of that other than a stamp, which is a grade in the grade book. And finally, when it comes to the test, we were like, 'Wait, I don't know this' because you never did it. So, it shouldn't be more of, um, I think the way that mindset would change of where I'm just going to finesse my teacher that way, that mindset will change is when they make grades worth something. If you have an A, they'll make it like, 'Oh, you actually know the material' compared to just like turn in some random homework assignment and it's whatever.

The concept of finessing came up once again when Dhruv persuaded me to believe that teachers, in general, are negligent in the learning process and progress of Asian students because they carry an underlying assumption that Asian students are fine on their own. The model minority stereotype was once again reified through lack of support from teachers and resources to those in need (Chang, 2017). When it comes to low achieving Asian American students, Hui-Michael and

García (2009) found that teachers typically overlooked struggling students unless the students displayed behavioral problems. The following excerpt is from the jottings I wrote after my conversation with Dhruv.

Dhruv tells me that he feels the need to “finesse” and “work on his own” because he thinks white students receive more help. Teachers would often check up on white students to see how they’re doing. Dhruv tells me that his teachers rarely check up on him. He said verbatim, “My teacher didn’t read through the packet I turned in and stamped it off, but she read through my friend’s packet. As long as I get the concept, usually, the teachers will let me off.” He believes that most of his teachers assume that Asian students are already knowledgeable of the content and therefore, don’t need additional help. This is in alignment with other Asian students’ concerns about how teachers expect them to help their peers. Dhruv tells me, “I have a lot of white friends, right? They get a lot of help from me. Last night, a group chat was formed among my peers from my Business class and the sole purpose of that was to get help from me.” (fieldnotes, 1/10/2020)

James also spoke of how there are two sides to every story and although he enjoys “getting away” (interview, 1/21/2020) with certain things, he was wary of the lack of adult guidance and supervision that could end up costing him later in life when he is no longer given an easy way out.

I think in the short term, it's always fun to like get away with stuff. But in the long term, it's like not helping us because later in life we're not going to get away with this kind of stuff. So, if we think that it's acceptable now I feel like it's gonna make us think that success [by getting away with things] is acceptable in the future and like that's not going to be a good thing.

Feeling “Othered”

Melissa Jeong, a Korean American senior’s following comment reflected a common concern shared among the Asian students who had voiced concerns about not being able to receive an ample amount of help or support from their teachers. She even furthered her argument to say how teachers do not casually strike a conversation with Asians and that the teachers are more willing to interact and build personal relationships with white students.

I think that teachers don't really come to them if they need help. They will circle around the room and go to the kids who...other people who are just be sitting there [or] something but then I would be sitting too, and I feel like I wish I could get some help [but] then they would not come over to like... I know one of my math classes does that sometimes. I can't tell if it's just like a habit of him, just like forgetting to come but yeah sometimes he doesn't come over to... I just noticed I don't really see him talking to Asian students in like math class or something and I definitely think there's like... I remember in sophomore year, I had this Chem teacher who definitely was like... wanted popularity so I guess you would like...I don't know if this can be attributed to like the Asian thing but like... I think there was two Asian kids... excluding me so there is three in total but the rest of the kids will be white kids and he would always be walking around like talking to each one but he would never come and talk to us.... 'cause a lot of the people were like sports players and there's not as many Asians playing sports I would say—unless in different sports but I guess he wanted the popularity with the kids...

James was indignant at being overlooked by white teachers and overshadowed by his white counterparts. James felt disappointed by the seeming lack of care and support from his teachers. He developed a feeling of social isolation and learned he could never belong to the dominant group. Moreover, he picked up on the hidden messages of being othered, standing in opposition of the whites in the racial hierarchy from both white teachers and peers.

- James: I guess some like indirect things that I've gotten is like sense of...I guess like an us versus them kind of thing. So, [...] what I would get from teachers is all like, 'You can get away with like stuff because you're not one of us.'
- Joan: Wait, us as in...
- James: Like I guess, I've been isolated or I feel kinda isolated. Um, yeah. I don't know how to put this into words, but it's like...
- Joan: So, who's against who?
- James: I guess, it's like not exactly like against each other, but it's like [...] since the majority of people in Redstone are white. I've always felt a disconnect between races, I think. So...within students and teachers... I guess it's more of like a race thing. It's both from white students and white teachers. Or I felt similar things from them.
- Joan: Oh, so do you get messages that it's like us, like white people versus you guys who are nonwhite?
- James: I guess, kind of. [...] I guess like the message that I've gotten from them is like, 'You're not one of us.' They're like, '[You are] one of those people who are like always overachieving. They're like bred for success and like, they don't care about anything else.' Kind of like those kinds of messages.

The Racialization of Academic Expectations

EA and SA youths desired to be understood as being smart based on individual effort and achievement as opposed to simply being granted the status of model minority. In the following conversation, Sarah articulated how she wishes to be respected as someone successful on her “own accord” (interview, 1/20/2020). My findings suggest that the model minority stereotype not only silences the voices and needs of both low and high-achieving students but also undermines student performance because academic success is deemed to be the expected norm for Asian students. Sunny Peng, a Chinese American sophomore, also spoke of the irritation that came from being framed as “naturally smart” (interview, 3/12/2020) because she’s Asian.

That we're just naturally smart. I would hear that sometimes since, um, a lot of Asians are in like the higher-up classes, other people would feel about them, ‘Oh, they're smart.’ Maybe and so like, that they're perfectly fine, they don't have any other issues... It's, I would say it's awkward and I'll be also kind of sad because I don't like when other people stereotype Asians as like, ‘Oh, they’re just all naturally smart’ and yeah.

The model minority discourse downplayed the academic success of the individual and attributed it to the entire group instead. Although Sarah commented on how being academically “successful” as an Asian is a coincidence for her, she continued that it is quite unclear whether she is considered “smarter” based on her true abilities or due to her racial identity. She said, “Other people are like ‘you are smarter’ and teachers also sometimes will be like, ‘I know you can handle this ‘cause like you are smarter.’ I don't know if that's based off like skill or if that's based off the fact that I'm Asian. So that's kind of confusing” (interview, 1/20/2020). Sarah’s questioning of her teachers’ high expectations of her left her thinking if they are based on the true judgment of her academic aptitude or based on the stereotypes that followed her. Sarah’s critical interrogation stemmed from a strong longing to be validated based on a true evaluation of their academic performance.

- Sarah: It's not because of the stereotype that I do it, it might line up with it. I might be successful because I'm Asian. That's just like a coincidence for me. I want to be successful. It doesn't matter whether I'm Asian or not.
- Joan: And your definition of being successful means that you do well in school?
- Sarah: Um, no, for me, that does play into it, but it's just my success is later on in life. Like when I'm happy in a good place of—not power—like good place where people respect me, but I also have a good life. And that in my idea, [success] is achieved when I do well, people are like, 'Wow, she's smart' of my own accord and getting into a good college so I can get a good job, which will sustain my life. [...] 'Cause I want certainty, like to know that I will have a good future and have a good life.

Ishaan made an interesting point that while he believes Asians, in general, are smart, the problem Asian students face comes from the way they are pressured in similar ways under the model minority stereotype. Under the racial framings of Asians as smart, those in need of additional attention and care are left unnoticed by schoolteachers.

Like mostly I would say, um, people from East Asia and, or I guess just not East Asia, but just Asia in general, like Asian people in general. There's this stereotype, as I've said many times before that Asians are smart. So, I think that Asians face that type of pressure, like, 'Oh, we need to be the best and we need to live up to what we were meant to live up to. And if we don't, then we're not good for anything.' That type of thing. Like, I haven't really felt that myself, but I know that people definitely do feel that.

Although Ishaan personally believes being pressured isn't necessarily damaging, the way Asian students across the racial group are faced with the same level of pressure and expectation sets some people up for failure.

But there's definitely nothing wrong with being pressured, but it's the fact that everyone is different and everyone is being pressured in the same way that the problem arises. Because everyone should be pressured in different ways. So, there's nothing wrong with being pressured, it's just that the way that everyone is pressured in the same way is where the problem comes.

In an interview with Amar, she was asked to share her understanding of how the ideals of achievement faced by Asians differ from those faced by others. She responded that Asians are influenced by interpersonal factors such as friends, teachers, family members, and racial/ethnic

communities that push them to espouse a higher standard of achievement than “the average white student would” (interview, 11/22/2019).

I feel like other students might have it a bit easier. The standards might be lower and yes, I think something put on them by the teachers but also by factors at home and by their friends because like students of one race tend to be friends within their own race. So, when you're surrounded by that same culture and with those same ideas, I think all around you there's external forces that are putting you to a higher standard, putting in and you're putting yourself to a higher standard than I think the average white student would.

James also made a similar argument about how Asian students are heavily influenced by parents who endorse high expectations from early on. He believed these parental engagements and practices are what separate Asians from other racial groups.

I think a majority of it is like [...] Asian American students are very success oriented. Like they've always had for example, for most people, their parents like constantly put this whole thing about having to be successful, going to college, finding a job that pays you really well. So that's been a very influence, very, very big influence. Especially like when you're young and they're talking about these kinds of things. I think that's what really separates them from other types of uh, other races or ethnicities.

Furthermore, Sarah argued how Asians are constantly faced with pressures to succeed and are set up to a higher standard than the rest of the racial groups. She also elucidated how the normative ideal of achievement ultimately entraps Asians to fall short, no matter how much they outperform others.

So one, we're always kind of like, I don't know if this is everyone else. It's just like for me, we're kind of set to like a higher standard, 'Oh, since you're Asian you need to know more, be better, do better.' And when we kind of just want to relax, you know, they're like, 'Oh no, you need to be doing this study for this.' Right? And then I also, I don't know how to word this correctly, like colleges and stuff. Like there's this recent thing with Harvard—it's not recent, it was like some time ago where they would like, it was harder for Asian people to come in because we're set to be so smart, even though some of us do struggle, that later hurts us because we're held to a higher standard. [...] And that also puts us down a little, ...we're not considered as much, for colleges and stuff...they'll go harder on us. So, because of something that we've been set up for, it kind of knocks us down too.

Ishaan's remark echoed others' perspectives around how Asian youths are incessantly held to a higher academic standard. Ishaan illustrated how Asians are distinguished by the way society has set them up to exert greater academic effort and achieve higher benchmarks. He shared with me how he has been tirelessly "pushed forward" to take his studies with the utmost importance.

The pressure of being an Asian person because, you know, society has some, like at least in this society, they have some sort of standard like, 'Oh, Asians are usually smarter than everybody else,' right? So, I'm not saying that's what sets me apart, but I'm saying that that's what society thinks sets me apart. And although that's true to some extent, because I've been pushed forward my entire life, like there's no one just sitting behind the wheel and I'm just going along for the ride.

According to Sarah, non-Asian groups did not face a similar level of pressure as Asians who are constantly up against the widely held belief that they need to outperform the rest. The following excerpt from Sarah's interview illustrates the differing levels of expectations and the way the successes of white and Black communities are interpreted. Based on her beliefs, while white students aren't judged against a certain set of standards, Black students are rewarded for their substandard academic performance.

Well, I guess, I don't know if this going to be racist or not, but this is like my mindset and what I think each different ethnicity is. I believe from what I've seen from society and like if you are white, you just have to like get through, you know, just like...like sure you can be smart, but it's kinda just like half fun, you know? And then when it's Black, it's kinda like if you do something good, it's valued way more than other people 'cause of past stereotypes against them 'cause like you know, the mindset where Black people can't do anything. So, if you do something good it's hundred times more blown up. So, I feel like it just differs.

Pradeep believed students procured varying levels of pressure based on their status as first-class or second-class citizenship. Pradeep regarded white people as those who truly belong in this country and are given more opportunities and institutional support to succeed. Indeed, like many others, Pradeep held firm views around who are considered "real" Americans and who truly belong in the US. By virtue of being recently arrived immigrants, Asians might have the far

greater drive but are constrained by obstacles to achieve upward mobility and therefore, are inclined to adopt a narrow definition of success (interview, 11/27/2019).

Maybe for a lot of African and Latino students, like the same pressure and stuff, but for a lot of white people, they're in their own country. They don't feel as much pressure 'cause they can always do, they always have like a third or fourth option that they can...

Jane who had regarded whites as true Americans also described white youths as having more freedom and opportunities to pursue their interests than Asian youths who face parental pressure to take on a narrow pathway towards getting into a “good college” to “become a doctor or lawyer” (interview, 11/5/2019). The stories that reproduced the stringent definition of academic success and the achievement of the American Dream were like oral lores passed down from generations within the Asian ethnic communities.

Jane: Um, I guess they're like similarities, but I feel like...it's a very narrow pathway. There aren't a lot of like... it's kind of like—you go to school, you do well, you go to college, you become a doctor or lawyer.

Joan: For Asians?

Jane: Yeah, it's very planned out versus like, I know some American parents are you know, ‘Just get good grades in school, go to college, do what you want to do.’ Not all of them are like that, but some. Or like stay out of crime, don't go to jail.

Joan: Why do you think there's a narrow pathway of academic, or job, career trajectory for Asian students?

Jane: I think because there has been...a lot of like success rate, like doctors are known for being really smart and doctors have high income. So... to be a doctor you have to be smart and usually if you want to get high income you have to go to college, and to get to good college, you have to get grades and do a lot of extracurricular stuff. So, I feel kind of like that sort of. So, past, previous stories from other people.

When Asians are “Truly Valued”

The pressure to succeed was a common experience in both average and high-performing students alike. Sarah revealed to me how she felt as though in Redstone High, her self-worth depended on how well she performed academically. She believed that Asians are only “truly valued” when they get to the top by getting ahead of everyone else and hence, proving their

“superiority” and smartness (interview, 1/20/2020). She had also espoused a belief that Asians thrive in schools because the Asian “mindset” and values are in direct alignment with the school culture.

There's definitely in school, like school related... It's just like...we have to do good in there. You know, you have to get [to the] top, the best, beat everyone else, you know, that's when you're truly valued. I believe that's like the Asian mindset related to school 'cause that's where you thrive. You have to show everyone you're superior. You're smart, you got this.

Asian Students as Designated Academic Tutor and IT Support

Throughout the study, my focal participants often faced undue expectations to “help out” other people in various tasks and assignments. Countless observations and notes supported the idea that Asian students were regarded as “the academic help,” designated tutor, teaching assistant, and IT support in classrooms (interview, 1/14/2020). Although it seemed as though people found Asian students approachable when asking for extra help or answers to class assignments, these situations or interactions didn’t necessarily lead to genuine friendships or meaningful relationships. Farid said,

I feel like sometimes people will come to me in class and be like, ‘Hey, can you help me out with this?’ And I guess we're acquaintances at that point. But some like...friends will come to me and ask me for help with homework 'cause I think in those classes, people are like, ‘Oh this guy is smart...It's not like necessarily a pathway to being a friend with someone else, but you can be.

Even teachers would often go out of their way to address their Asian students to ask them for IT support or to help their classmates. Amy Kim, a Korean American freshman female student added,

Oh, and also one time, there's this teacher and she needed like help to fix a setting or something on her phone and I was with my friend and she's like white you know, and then she was like ‘Okay, can a student help me?’ And then my friend was like ‘Oh, I can help you’ and she was like ‘Oh, that's okay’ and she asked me to help her. So, things like that. They think that we're like, you know...IT support.

I often witnessed how Asian youths were caught in situations where people insisted on asking for help even when the Asian youths felt incapable of helping others and in need of extra help themselves. When conversations around Asians as “the help” came up, Asian youths rarely spoke about their feelings in a positive light. They were mostly exasperated by the fact that they were seen as submissive and easily taken advantage of. Sunny claimed,

There will be other people asking me to help them with their math and stuff out and I’d be like, ‘Sorry, I can’t, I don’t understand this problem.’ And they’re like, ‘No, you’re Asian. You should know this.’ I’m like, ‘Sorry, no.’

Pradeep regarded the model minority stereotype as a “positive” stereotype because Asians are commonly viewed as “straight-A kid doing, a lot of clubs and stuff” and “they’re always praised for like having smartness.” However, even for Pradeep, the downside of the stereotype stemmed from teachers’ and students’ behaviors in asking Asian students for help. If the youths failed to meet the underlying assumption that “Asians already know the answers most of the time,” they felt as if they were “singled out” (interview, 11/27/2019). Similarly, Danveer Jha, an Indian American freshman also talked about how he would often get approached by peers asking him for answers as well as teachers asking him to help others. Although he feels like a valuable team member most of the time when helping his classmates, the consequences of feeling “shame” (interview, 1/2/2020) of letting people down were far too great to prevail.

I think if they know that you’re good at this, then they might expect you to do more or better or help people more... I feel honored doing that, I guess, but also puts pressure on me considering that, if I’m wrong then and they do follow me, then I feel like I’ve been put under the spotlight of shame. But then I think about it again is I think that they actually remember or that everyone makes mistakes is what it will be about. Not stating that I’ve gotten something wrong because of course, I’m pretty sure even Stephen Hawkins would’ve probably got something wrong on his lifetime or something. So yeah, I don’t tend to think about it too much.

As Dhingra (2020) suggests, Asians are perceived as almost robotic in that they know the answers to all problems and can fix mechanical issues. The robotic characteristics of Asians are “what gives ‘it’ the ability to excel and yet be denied the respect given to a human” (Dhingra, 2020, p. 235). Asian youths were often trained and programmed like robots—existing to perform tasks and provide academic help for humans.

Feeling of Not Living Up to the Expectations

Asian youths are known when they have let others down and therefore, tarnished their model minority identity and status.

- Clara: Mm, I feel like they have higher expectations on Asian students than white or other race. ‘Cause, um, they're always like, ‘Oh, I'm sure you did good.’ And they're always like, ‘Oh, you're going to ACE it.’ And I feel like they have super high expectations for me.
- Joan: Mm. And how does that make you feel?
- Clara: Hmm, like pressured, I guess. If I don't do well, like I feel they're going to be more disappointed.
- Joan: Hmm. And can you tell when they get more disappointed?
- Clara: If I don't do very well, like poorly, unusual, I guess they sometimes [get] like shock, a little surprised.

Asian youths felt shame and a strong sense of disappointment when they believed they had failed to live up to their “name” and the expectations laid upon them. Elsie explained to me how it was common for Asian students including herself, to experience internalized racism of not feeling up to par.

...But I think it's really internalized too. ‘Cause I mean you're kind of setting yourself apart and you're saying racist things to yourself. So, uh, I know [it is] internalized racism. So, I guess there's some things I've heard are like Asians are supposed to be smart or they're really... And if they weren't considered smart, they feel like, ‘Oh, I'm not living up to my name’ or something.

Lilian Wu, a Chinese American sophomore spoke of how she too would internalize her failure of living up to the expectation. The racialized understanding of performance and achievement was reinforced by the non-members of the Asian community as well. She sternly shared, “So, for

example, if I got a B on a math test, I'd be like, 'Oh no, I have disappointed my culture.' And then for example, a white person might come in and be like, 'Oh yeah, your family's going to disown you now because you didn't get an A'" (interview, 11/27/2019). Lilian told me how racist remarks and slights, disguised as banter, came from both Asians and non-Asians peers. The social actors across all racial groups have played a role in maintaining the model minority stereotype and disciplining each other in ways that reinforced the racialization processes of Asian youths.

Um, well I don't know if we're really like... racist. I don't know if people are really like racist against us, but there are a lot of jokes about like, 'Oh you got that A, oh you must be Asian' or 'That's 'cause you're Asian' or 'If you got that B bruh, how can you call yourself an Asian? You're more like a Bsian' and stuff like that.

Lilian shared her profound insights of how what might seem like light jokes and taunts are devices that solidify racialized understandings of achievement and place the psychological burden of attributing one's self-worth and value to academic success.

Well, I've heard people talk about how they're kind of annoyed by it or maybe hurt by it 'cause it's like, 'Oh I worked really hard to get this good grade on the test. But in the end, it's just chalked up to my Asian-ness' or people feeling like, what has become like a joke has really turned into their reality. Because they didn't get a good grade on this test, they feel like they're not a real Asian. And so, even if their own fellow Asians are joking about how like, 'Oh yeah, since we're all Asian, that's why we're also smart'. Then they feel like if they're not smart than they're not belonging as an Asian and there's probably other stuff too.

Keeping Each Other in Check and Staying Ahead in the Competition

There were negative consequences that followed from not conforming or failing to conform to the model minority stereotype. Those who did not fit or did not attempt to fit into such stereotypes were judged and punished by various players within the system in which the students were measured. Asian youths were judged, but rarely praised or rewarded by active promoters of the stereotype. Internalization of the model minority stereotype and ascribed

Asianness had shaped how the Asian youths perceived each other. I had observed prescriptive behaviors of the members of the group that resembled monitoring or policing of other Asians' academic performance, whether or not they belonged to the same ethnic group. These types of behaviors were observed frequently especially among the Indian American boys' group. While one member of the group described it as nothing more than "bragging" with "not much pressure," James who was the only Korean American member of the entourage described such practices as "toxic behaviors" (interview, 1/21/2020).

Joan: Can you give examples of what you consider as toxic behaviors?

James: So, a really big problem within my specific friend group was constantly degrading each other for fun and it's something that I just have to live with and just watch 'cause it's so ingrained into our friend group. And I think a part of it is because we're all Asian and we're all hyper-competitive, so we constantly see each other's mistakes and make fun of him. Um, and that's something that I really wanted to change my friend groups' behavior[s] about and to a degree...I think they're still engaging in that type of behavior.

Joan: Um, so can you expand on what are some other things that um, would be considered as toxic behaviors?

James: Um, I guess like...I've seen like a lot of like kind of putting each other down, like consistently making fun of each other for the smallest mistakes and...I feel like it makes everything worse. Like even if it's kind of fun, in the long term it's going to create much more hostile environment and a lot of like...bad feelings.

Joan: Do they ever make fun of or degrade other people outside of your friend group?

James: Not really. It's just like, I mean not in the way that like [...] they definitely talk like that, talk about people behind their backs. But that's mainly because they just don't like them. Within our friend group, they make fun of each other. Because they're like friends, they're like playfully making fun of each other. Like sometimes it's just over the top. It's not a fun, not fun or cool thing to do.

When I asked why he and his friends play into these "toxic behaviors," he said,

I think one part is to be fun...because when the entire group is laughing at one person and it's because of comments that you said, it makes you seem like you're more part of the group. Um, a second part is probably ego... because if you insult someone else, it makes you seem better and that's just talking from personal experience. Um, but yeah, I think that's the two main drivers of toxic behavior.

The practice of endorsing the model minority mentality and behaviors to others also meant that they were most likely internalizing themselves and "selectively comparing" themselves to the

“highest tier.” Diya who was an active member of the forensics team, was aware of how Asian students are exposed to a “dangerous mentality” (interview, 2/19/2020) and destructive behaviors of comparing themselves to others and sanctioning their own performance to strive for unusually high goals.

We don't like, um, I don't think we see ourselves as being some extremely smart person. At least that's the idea I have. I think that the idea that we have about ourselves is that um, we are people who try our hardest in class and we expect higher results from ourselves. We selectively compare ourselves. So, like we're not going to compare ourselves to someone that has straight B's. We're not going to, in our eyes they're like not there. And it's a dangerous mentality, I feel. 'Cause we selectively compare ourselves to the people at the highest tier and we feel that we aren't smart enough to be at that high tier, but we forget as like labeled smart kids, we forget to realize that we're actually decently smart. 'Cause we only acknowledge the people above us and we don't even realize that there's people below us, I feel.

Elsie Chen, a Chinese American freshman, reflected on how the dogmatic and competitive mentality and behavior are reinforced within her home culture. Similarly, Nikhil spoke of how he would also receive implicit and explicit messages from his parents to compare himself to those “who are better” (interview, 11/26/2019) than him.

...That usually happens to be Asian students which is also [what] my mom says. She's like, "Compare kids who are better than you, there's always kids who are dumber than you." Those kids [who are better] happened to be Asian most of the time.

Parental Influence

For middle-class Korean American youths, attending college is not a major life decision, merely which college she would end up is one of the biggest main concerns in life. Amy Kim had never considered the idea of opting out of college after high school as a possibility and this topic had never even crossed her mind until our extensive conversations about her educational aspirations. As a 15-year-old freshman from a middle-class immigrant family from South Korea, Amy spoke about her parents' stringent oversight of her educational trajectory. Implications of college-bound honor roll student as the quintessential Korean American student permeated her

social spheres of influence—school, home, and co-ethnic community spaces. However, Amy did not fit into the “typical” Korean American student. She saw herself as college-bound, but she was far from being an honor roll student at school. Her placement in a regular math class had purportedly categorized her as a low-achieving student compared to her Asian counterparts and she often encountered her parents’ dismissive attitudes toward her aspirations in fine arts and music. She self-identified herself as an outlier from the model minority stereotype and yet, she was able to maintain a fixed, but precarious perspective of what she thinks she should achieve, firmly holding onto the great promise of a college education.

A firm belief in education as the pathway to success for their children was a pattern found across Korean families regardless of their class positionings. These families from nondominant communities were hyperaware of their social and racial positionings in a racist society and were vigilant of the potential threat of discrimination and racial injustice. Asian immigrants’ narrow views and singular narratives of what constitutes success can largely be explained by concerns over experiencing potential discrimination (J. Lee & Zhou, 2015; S. J. Lee, 2009; E. Park, 2018). Asian immigrant parents are inclined to adopt a narrow frame of achievement and success to better prepare their children for or protect them from the prejudice of being non-white in a society hostile to nondominant groups. The awareness of the odds that are stacked against them meant that Amy had to divert away from her true passion in the arts to strive for narrow rendering of success construed as the only aspiration imaginable for Korean youths.

Regardless of whether Asian immigrant children are American born or foreign born, most immigrant parents struggle to keep up with the schooling experience and acculturation processes of their children. Lack of English proficiency and unfamiliarity with the U.S. education system leave them feeling vulnerable in preparing their children to do well in school. Therefore, parents

tend to be controlling and practice strong home-based parental involvement to compensate for their reluctance to actively participate in school activities due to linguistic and cultural barriers (E. Kim, 2002; Turney & Kao, 2010). These challenges weakened parental authority which led assisting their children in navigating the school system remains one of the most concerning issues for immigrant parents (Zhou, 2009). Therefore, Chinese parents were directly involved in teaching their children at home and saw themselves as responsible for helping their children through the learning process (Huntsinger & Jose, 2009). For Chinese American families, parental involvement in children's education consisted of explicit practice-oriented teaching strategies at home (Huntsinger & Jose, 2009). Their pattern of parental involvement was strikingly different from white parents, who were involved in activities at schools. The teaching strategies of Chinese American parents were structured and formal, and parents tended to believe in teaching multiple ways for their children to gain deeper understanding of the content (Huntsinger & Jose, 2009).

When it comes to striving for academic excellence, Chinese American and Korean American students, for example, were also expected by their parents to do well in school because of intergenerational traditional parenting practices that come from the parents' exposure to highly competitive educational settings in their countries of origin. Additionally, parents' investment in their children's education comes from the sacrifices they made to migrate to the U.S. to provide better opportunities for their children. Parental sacrifice instills in students a sense of guilt and obligation to follow their parents' wishes and do well in school (Kao, 2004; Louie, 2004). Students shared the same value for education as their parents; however, because they were aware of their parents' high expectations, they felt disappointed, ashamed, and

frustrated which ultimately led them to feel helpless and hopeless when they failed to achieve academic success (Suh & Satcher, 2005).

Discursive arrangements and intersubjective encounters in everyday practices of family and community-oriented culture were enough to construct college-going mindset as the norm. Significant amount of pressure to perform well to receive admissions to top-tier higher education institutions were put on Amy by her family to preserve their full memberships in her co-ethnic communities. Considering the cultural assumption that intelligence is not innate but rather a derivative of hard-work and diligence, college education was framed as achievable for anyone who studies “hard” enough. In a culture where hard work is considered to be a greater determinant of student performance than innate ability or talent, failing to perform well academically is attributed to insufficient effort (Stevenson & S. Y. Lee, 1990). Therefore, validations from parents as well as community members came from youths’ high performance and educational outcome.

Conclusion

This chapter examined how Asian youths make sense of, negotiate, and resist the model minority identity. While some Indian American girls were prescribed to embrace the model minority identity and the pan-ethnic Asian American identity so that they could be identified as both Indian *and* Asian, the Indian American boys internalized and leveraged this stereotype to gain a competitive edge over other Asian and white peers. On the other hand, the Indian boys utilized their “model” minority reputation to achieve their academic goals by working “smart” rather than working “hard.” Their display of compliant behaviors in interactions and relationships with schoolteachers allowed them to participate in, what they refer to as, “finessing.” This, in turn, afforded them the opportunities and strategies to freely navigate

through the education system. Moreover, the Indian American boys also used the practice of “finessing” to gain acceptance from peers. “Finessing” helped them to actively resist the negative stigma of being labeled as “nerd” and “geek.” Thus, the youths learned how to take advantage of and be economical with the ascribed model minority identity and employ both dominant and nondominant cultural capital to gain acceptance from their teachers and peers all the while outperforming others. The data centered around the processes in which Indian American youths negotiated and complicated the model minority discourse across gender lines revealed the pathways and scripts to which Asian American youths were expected to ensure adherence.

Both East and South Asian American youths expressed their concerns about being overlooked by the social actors within the system (Wing, 2007). The Asian youths were held at higher expectations than others and were domesticated to provide academic help and IT support. Most suffered from stress and shame upon feeling as though they had not been living up to the high expectations that they had been held against. Lastly, while the Asian youths felt pressured by teachers and fellow peers to uphold academic excellence, they also sanctioned the members of their same ethnic or racial groups and each other to espouse and assume the model minority identity in the pursuit of academic singularity.

Chapter Five: Navigating the Perpetual Foreigner Stereotype

Chapter 5 focuses on how East and South Asian American students' experiences being raced and stereotyped as perpetual foreigners marginalizes them. The data presented in this chapter unearth how the youths are subjugated and "othered" as designated foreigners who are perpetually un-American. Although they have not consistently endured extreme forms of hate, these youths have encountered covert forms of isolation, racial slurs, deprecatory insults, and hidden messages of partiality from their peers and teachers. This chapter demonstrates how microassaults, microaggressions, and microinvalidations (though not necessarily "micro" or insignificant to those injured) experienced by these students manifested from the historically accumulated ideological construction of inferiority (Sue et al., 2009) that traps Asian American students as second-class citizens. The normative whiteness wielded ideological discourses that framed students of Asian descent as not only model minorities but also perpetual foreigners—an antithesis of what it meant to be a true American.

Asians as Perpetual Foreigners

Although the model minority stereotype may appear to be at odds with the perpetual foreigner stereotype at first, inherent in it is the idea that Asian Americans are always perceived as foreigners, regardless of the efforts they undertake to fit in (Tuan, 1968). One of the study participants, Eve, had internalized the perpetual foreigner stereotype (Pyke & Dang, 2003) as she mentioned how she considers herself as "just Chinese," someone who could never become a "full American" (Olsen, 1997; Tuan, 1968). Eve, who is a U.S., born Chinese American youth, mentioned how she would introduce herself as Chinese American to non-Asians because she is always expected to give other answers than the U.S. to customary questions such as "Where are you really from?" (interview, 11/2/2019).

For Chinese American, I guess that's how I would introduce myself to other people. Yeah, if the people ask me where I'm from, thing always kind of throws me off because I'm from America but they always expect her to give some other answer. I've [said] I'm from China or from an Eastern country.'

During individual interviews with the youths, the conversations around the forever foreigner stereotype came up quite often. Although Jane could not clearly define what it means to be an American, she was certain that it could not include Asian identities. She said, "Usually when I think of America, I think of not-Asian." Ishaan depicted a stereotypical American as someone of European descent who has lived in the U.S. for many generations. He noted, "I guess if someone were to be the most stereotypical definition of American, they would be someone that is from Europe and has lived in America so many generations that they've lost their European heritage and identify as American." This was the general understanding of the American identity—that only the whites were Americans. Although Ishaan was born in the U.S., he was perceived by himself and others as "foreign." Even Danveer, his friend, described how whites could only be considered full Americans while Ishaan can only be considered "a foreigner who happens to have an American citizen[ship]" (fieldnotes, 1/3/2020).

Sarah, among others, struggled to perceive themselves as "fully American" because others do not perceive them as a "normal American, [who] has to be white." Christine Smith, a Chinese American adoptee, took this idea further to define Asian Americans as someone with at least one "American"—meaning "white" parent (interview, 2/12/2020). Her idea of being half "American" in the Asian American identity meant being half "white, genetically," which was an intriguing concept. Once again, being American was code for being white.

Joan: So, what makes a person Asian American, in your opinion?

Christine: Well, I feel like, probably like, I don't know...like what I've heard is maybe like having like or generically maybe having one parent American and they're half Asian.

Joan: Oh really? So being half Asian and half white?

Christine: Yeah.

Asian youths also recognized how Asian and American cultures were discrete binaries in that one was the antithesis of the other. Clara Chang, a Korean American sophomore, mentioned how the middle-class white normative culture was defined as the American standard way of living. According to her, Americans are “white people, ‘cause they’re, the dominant race and it’s, like, they live by, the standards of American people.” For non-whites, being American required the adoption of whiteness. In Clara’s words, “If you’re from a different country and you come to America, following their lifestyle is [what] I would consider it to be like Americanized” (interview, 11/3/2019). Most Asian youths referred to the stages of acculturation in relation to white normative culture as an assessment of how one is “Americanized” and “westernized” and therefore, a standard by which individuals have attributed the identity of “half” American, which offered them a hyphenated sense of self (e.g., Chinese-American, Indian-American, and Korean-American).

Each day, Asian youths were reminded implicitly of how they do not fully belong to the American identity through individual-level interactions with their peers, thereby leading to the internalization of racial oppression (Pyke, 2010; Schwalbe et al., 2000). Lillian reflected on her experience of being unexpectedly but frequently excluded from the American identity and subtly perceived as “foreign” (interview, 11/27/2019) through interactions with her peers in school. She added,

Well, I don't know if I see myself as more American than Chinese, but I feel like I don't want to, I don't know, I don't want to be Chinese, but like feel like if I'm in America, I should be more American than Chinese. Like I say, Chinese American. ‘Cause once I was talking to my friend and like we were talking about like, we were like researching something for some class about the obesity rate in China versus in U.S. And I was like, ‘Oh ha ha, the U.S. is obesity rate is much higher than China's.’ And then my friend was like, ‘Oh, so you're just making fun of us Americans. Right? Ha ha.’ And I was like, ‘Did

you forget I'm an American too?' 'Cause like I feel like if I'm like Chinese American, other people see me as more Chinese than American and therefore like more foreign.

As Asians are commonly perceived as perpetual foreigners and outsiders, Asian youths were always associated with their countries of origin or the region their Asian ancestry is primarily associated with. Danveer elaborated on how Asians are “treated” differently as they are associated with various stereotypes and discourses that are ethnically tied to them (interview, 1/2/2020). Thus, according to him, Asians were always regarded as having close ties with their countries of origin and never fully belonging to their adopted home country.

Joan: Do you believe East and South Asian Americans face certain challenges in the U.S. because of their race or ethnicity?

Danveer: Something bad happens like from Asia, from part of Asia, and they could be treated differently in school or at work or maybe something good happens and they be like treated, uh, better. I think they'll be treated...they'll be in more in the community, more accepted, I guess. It depends on current events, sometimes depending like...it's fine, but sometimes if it's...current events are little bit negative, then society could react a little negative to that, to them. If it's positive, maybe a little more positive towards them.

Joan: Are you just referring to Asian students or referring to students of color in general?

Danveer: Just Asian, maybe students of color and just in general. Overall, maybe it's just people, um, maybe like American citizens who moved from a different country and become citizens and then something in the U.S. happens, they in that country will be treated a little different, it's just overall in the world how society would react negatively or maybe like maybe some negativity has been shaded on that particular country, then society, especially in America, they would support that, although considering that they don't deserve that negativity. I think I find that a lot in America.

Resisting Hyphenated Identity

Positive ethnic identity yields affirmative acculturation attitudes and adjustment outcomes at schools. Shrake's (1996) study found that Korean American youths struggled with fewer internalized and externalized problems when they were strongly attached to their ethnic identity. However, as racial minorities, it is unavoidable for Asian Americans to experience processes of racialization which contribute to internalized racism. While they defined themselves

as “Asian Americans” within the larger society, many Asian students did not actively seek to self-identify using the generic Asian American label; there are also those who rejected their pan-Asian identification (C. J. Kim 1999; Tuan, 2001). When it comes to their racial/ethnic identity, they tend to leave out the “American part” and adhered to their ethnic identity. However, when it comes to identification on official documents, Asian youths had no choice but to accept the pan-ethnic categorization and the generic Asian American identity. As a case in point, several participants spoke of how they would only opt for the Asian American category as it would be the most appropriate racial identity category when filling racial questionnaires on documents.

Eve Yao, a Chinese American female student from the senior class noted,

I guess for Asian Americans like a much more broader [term], so it's like mainly more used in America because the Asian American, like that's what you would check off on one of those surveys about your race and Asian Americans, very broad general statement. It's sometimes not even Asian Americans...just Asian, which is weird because there's a lot of Asians, Asian Americans in America.

Ishaan echoed Eve's argument, stating that he would endorse the Asian American category only when it came to filling in the demographic survey questions. Although he is more accustomed to American culture, he told me that he still does not consider himself just an American as his ethnicity does not align with a “typical” and “stereotypical American identity” (interview, 1/10/2020). Although he claimed to be deeply immersed in the dominantly white American culture, he only identified as an Indian. Young people consistently reclassified themselves and strategically used “racial/ethnic” categories according to situated contexts (Pollock, 2004b).

I think maybe, you know, those are the, like the bubbles that they have you fill in when you're taking any sort of standardized tests. So that's really the reason why I said Asian. I didn't really wrap my head around the specifics, but I guess if I were to specify it, it would mostly be um, Asian American or Indian American.

The interview with Ishaan revealed how he perceived himself as an American only in terms of his birthplace, nationality, and citizenship while the American identity, for him, related to a predominantly white discourse.

I'm just American? No, because obviously there's another culture involved in an entire other country. If I were to kind of classify it, it would be yes, I'm American because I was born here, therefore I have American citizenship. But if after, if I were to bring it down to the ultimate bare bones, that's what I would say. Like, yes, I'm American. But if someone were to ask me, what is your ethnicity? I wouldn't say—or I don't know if that's what ethnicity is—but if someone were to ask me, what is your ethnicity, then I wouldn't say, 'Oh, I'm American' because my family lineage is not from there. And also, my culture is not similar to that of a typical, I don't know, I guess the stereotypical American.

Across all ethnic groups considered, most youths, including those who are foreign-born and U.S.-born, identified themselves as either Chinese, Indian, or Korean. None of these youths felt confident enough to identify themselves as simply American. Some internalized the perpetual foreigner stereotype and simply associated themselves with their ethnicities as they could not perceive an overlap between the two identities—Asian and American. Such strong ties to one's ethnic identity were protective responses to racism (Kibria, 2000) and the fear of being called un-American if they wished to identify with the nation's identity. Melissa, a daughter of first-generation Korean immigrants, elaborated on why she considers herself “just Korean.” She said, “I always thought of it, like, you should always just be this one or the other, instead of both” (interview, 2/25/2020). Eve, who also introduced herself as just Chinese said, “since no one called me American just by itself, I never considered myself American. I didn't have an affirmation from the outside.” Eve did not feel comfortable with the overgeneralized Asian American identity because she was critical of such a “western” and monolithic view of Asian Americans (interview, 11/2/2019).

Um, but I think for Asian American is just kind of how I...I don't really like identify myself as Asian American 'cause I always feel like that's kind of a very western view on Asia where it's like a monolithic, it's just Asia, you know, like, um, 'cause there's so

many different layers within Asia, so many different countries and it's different countries and cultures that don't necessarily even overlap. Um, so I can see how it can be a very broad, like a general... um, coverage for Asian, like Asian people in America. But I guess I don't necessarily identify, I mean I am fine with people calling me Asian American, but I don't necessarily would call myself Asian American. Um, 'cause I know where I'm from, like where my ancestors was come from.

Similarly, Sarah, a daughter of first-generation Indian immigrants, identified herself as “Indian, not Indian American” because she wanted to “keep in touch” with her historical roots (interview, 1/20/2019).

- Sarah: I'll go to like Indian traditional stuff, like I don't want to make myself American because I want to keep in touch with my past history. So, I'd say I identify as an Indian, not Indian American.
- Joan: Um, would you ever say that you're Asian American?
- Sarah: Yeah, 'cause it's like India... usually I like probably will say that 'cause on college apps, it's like Asian and then I'm like yeah, 'cause that's where India is in Asia. So, I just say it like that.

Although Lillian perceived herself as Chinese American, she was drawn closer to her Chinese identity within the intersectional hybridity of her self-identity. She stated that she identifies as an “American-born Chinese” because if she says, “Chinese American” instead, “there’s more emphasis on the China part” (interview, 11/27/2019). Chinese ends up being the dominant identity, regardless of how she self-identifies.

Interestingly, Farid shared a different perspective on his self-identification as an Indian. As he believed that “American’ doesn’t carry any other cultural connotations,” he made sense of the Indian American identity to be synonymous with being just an Indian. Farid’s definition of “American” signified an understanding of the identity as one that has no “cultural connotations” because it encompasses “all cultures” (interview, 1/14/2020).

I don't think there's anyone who says American. So like, I guess I won't either because you know, I might have been born here and I might have like more of the American culture within me, but like American culture isn't all that, you know, it's like, like if you try to describe American culture without using other cultures, without describing other cultures, you couldn't do it because you know, that's what America is like. So, I guess if I

said an Indian American, it would be the same thing as saying Indian, 'cause like American doesn't carry any other cultural connotations for me.

Over time, youths learned to shift their identity by adjusting to the norms and values in varying contexts. These psychological and behavioral shifts in self-identity occurred as a defensive reaction to experiences of marginalization and discriminatory acts (Yeh et al., 2005) among East and South Asian youths who classified themselves as racial, ethnic, and cultural in-betweeners who neither could be identified as fully American nor by their ethnic identity. In Farid's words, "I'm neither here nor there. I'm not white enough to be American nor Brown enough to be Indian." James also spoke of being in-between two cultures.

I guess like, I've like incorporated it all a lot more of like, I guess what I'd call American culture, but I'm kind of in the middle between it. So yeah, it's like I'm in the middle of like, being full American and maybe like Korean birth line or bloodline and then like, Asian and I don't really identify with American and I'm like in the middle. (interview, 1/21/2020)

Desiring Whiteness and the Deserving Minorities

Most youths reflected on their past attempts to achieve and acquire the white American identity which stemmed from their childhood desires to fit in. Eve mentioned how her desire to be was rooted in something beyond this idea. In her words, it was the system, which was riddled with "so many injustices" (interview, 11/2/2019) such that minorities were raised to aspire toward cultural immersion, whiteness and white privilege, and validation as Americans. She mentioned how the current school culture, with the increase in diversity, has become arguably more conducive for her and other minorities to embrace their ethnic roots and culture, although the school remained far from becoming a truly inclusive environment.

I think being like Chinese and growing up in America, you always feel like, because there's such a wide variety of racial identities where you grow up, even in Wisconsin where it's still majority white. [...] I know that like in the past, a lot of minorities growing up in America might feel like they want to blend in where they want to be, like either

considered American, only American or being able to be like having the same experiences as a white person because there are so many, so much injustice back then.

Asian youths invested their efforts in achieving whiteness, incorporating themselves into the dominant society, and excelling academically because they had to prove their worthiness as “foreigners” who deserve to be in the U.S. This is because the model minority ideology emphasizes individualism, and those who digress from the presupposed stereotype and the American norm are blamed for their shortcomings and failures and, consequently, given foreigner label (L. Park, 2008). Similar to the findings presented in chapter four, those who strongly believed in one’s merit as an objective measurement of worthiness and deservingness embraced the model minority stereotype, as in the case of Ishaan.

Like the main place where I'm conservative lies in the entire immigration thing because basically like, you know your parents and my parents and parents of Asian people, they have to work hard to get into this country, right? It's not just like a free ticket, like, ‘Oh here you go.’ You know what I'm saying? Like you need to have an education, you need to have a degree and you need to prove that you're somebody and not just some random person to get into the country. So, by having random people who don't prove anything get into the country, it doesn't make sense because the person who has all these credentials is allowed to live in the country. But then the person who has no credentials is also allowed to live in the country and a person who has no credentials wants these, the same rights as the person who has way better credentials. Like obviously asylum exists, but obviously country's own problems also exist. So, what are we going to solve? Are we going to solve the problems of the entire world or are we going to solve the problems of our own country first? I feel like we need to focus on our own country's problems before we worry about the problems of the entire world. Because obviously our country is going to continue to have problems, but if we don't focus on our own country's problems, then how are we going to focus on anybody else’s problems? (interview, 1/10/2020)

Nonetheless, the Asian youths were in a double bind, struggling to identify ways to “act as white as possible” and prove their worthiness as deserving minorities while distancing themselves away from the “smart Asian stereotype” to receive further social acceptance (interview, 11/26/2019). The following excerpt from an interview with Nikhil demonstrated the fundamental paradox inherent in the model minority stereotype. While Nikhil felt frustrated that his peers

would attribute his success to his ethnicity rather than his effort, he still adhered to the model minority identity because he believed that Asians are intrinsically smart and, therefore, deserving to be in the U.S.

Nikhil: Yeah. I don't know. For a long time in my elementary school life, I didn't really understand race and ethnicity. I just tried to act as white as possible.

Joan: Why?

Nikhil: I don't know. I just felt like I didn't fit in. Now I understand that it's not that big of a deal, especially coming from such a ... I'd say this is a pretty diverse school. Of course, there aren't that many Black kids, but at least they exist and at least they are here. There is this 95% white, which is bad. Maybe it's not that diverse, but at least there are other races, I guess is what I'm saying. But in my elementary school life, I tried so hard to be white until I realized that wasn't it.

Joan: Oh, why?

Nikhil: I don't know. I just did. I felt like during sixth grade I was just like, no, this isn't working out.

Joan: Why wasn't it working out for you?

Nikhil: I don't know. I tried so hard to get away from the smart Asian stereotype because I'd win spelling bees, win geography bees, and always trying to hide it.

Joan: You'd try to hide it?

Nikhil: Yeah. I wouldn't like it when the school would congratulate me for winning the spelling bee.

Joan: Why?

Nikhil: Because I'd be like, 'Oh my God, just because I'm Asian.'

Joan: Oh, is it because you're portrayed as a nerd? Or is it-

Nikhil: Yeah.

Joan: Because you're portrayed as an Asian-

Nikhil: It's because of both but thinking that the Asianness has led to the nerdiness, led to the win.

Joan: Are you talking about how Asians are being overlooked and being seen as smart all the time? So, whenever you-

Nikhil: I feel like there is a certain ... I don't know how many people, it's probably quite low, who just believe [it]. I don't know if they're joking, but they would say stuff like, "Oh you won just because you're Asian." Shut up, I won because I studied.

Joan: Oh.

Nikhil: Yeah, stuff like that. But in sixth grade I kind of didn't really care. So, I just did what I did.

Joan: Yeah... so, being white didn't work out?

Nikhil: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Joan: So now, what works for you?

Nikhil: Honestly, I don't know what I do. I talk to white people all the time. I don't try and act superficially white. I try and act like who I am. [...] I just say what is in my mind. I don't try and act ... I don't try and pretend to be someone who I'm not.

Asian-ness as an Antithesis of American-ness

When Sarah was asked who would most easily navigate through the school spaces with small talk during lunch hours, she indirectly answered my question by pointing out that white students would effortlessly navigate the school since they are the most popular among the student body. This conversation also suggested that the most popular people were white, financially comfortable, social, and outgoing.

Joan: So, who would easily navigate through school? Which groups or which kids?
 Sarah: Probably white kids. It's 'cause like them, like if you look at the popular kids, you know how they're the popular people, it's almost all white people.
 (interview, 1/2/2020)

Similar to Lillian's depiction of white students as the most "popular" at the school, Dhruv spoke about how it is inevitable that the white peers are "usually the most popular" who ranked the "highest" in the social hierarchy. He noted, "The white kids are usually the most popular. And then also like, people who play sports. Um, and most people who play sports, they're also white. They're like technically the highest, I guess" (interview, 2/14/2020). When Amy was asked to identify who is considered not cool, she said,

I mean not the smart kids but like...the debate kids and—I mean not trying to be racist but like most of the non-white kids and of course, there are like some non-white kids that are like cool but you know, ...a lot of the kids who aren't white. (interview, 1/21/2020)

When Amy was asked if there are Asian kids who are considered cool, she said,

She's like really popular but she's like adopted, you know, so I feel like another Redstone thing is that everyone has to do the same...in order to be cool you have to follow a certain trend but like she's very...whitewashed, you know, so I think if she was very Asian she wouldn't be cool, you know.

With regard to white students' demeanor, presence, disposition, and attitudes, Asian youths self-assessed how they comported themselves. They also evaluated other Asians through the racialized lens of the dominant group, which then impelled them to internalize their

perceived sense of inferiority (Osajima, 2007). According to the study participants, Asians were essentialized into prominent cultural and behavioral characteristics of being “reserved” and unsocial whereas Americans exhibited the opposite traits.

Jane: Um, I think that they don't really expect them to be outgoing. This might just be me, but like I think whenever I talk in class, the teachers always look really surprised, like really surprised. But I generally do talk...

Joan: Um, do Asian students ... are they actually very quiet and not outgoing?

Jane: Um, I know plenty who are.

Joan: Do you know if it is a personality thing? Is it a, uh, anxiety? Is it just because they don't want to be vocal in class?

Jane: The kids who aren't outgoing and stuff? Um, I feel like part of it is like an anxious thing. Like they don't know what people think of them because I know, I think with uh, my friend was telling me how she gets like nervous. Like she's afraid she'll like mess up something and like she'll say something wrong. So that's usually why she doesn't really talk.

(interview, 11/5/2019)

Jane argued about how white peers composed themselves differently from the behaviors of Asian students. According to her, being “Americanized” meant being more like whites and/or “acting white.”

Jane: You can usually tell if someone is like a Korean citizen versus like an American citizen. Like you can usually tell like their behaviors are different.

Joan: Can you say more?

Jane: Um, like certain things like, oh, like the way we dress, physical appearance and what we think of physical appearance or what we think about certain things or how we talk because not all Korean people, but like a lot of Korean people are more reserved, like facial expression wise. And American people usually we're like animated and yeah, very, very animated. So, like you can usually kind of tell from that and a lot by...

Jane had embraced the message that being “Americanized” and being “Koreanized” are discrete units and distinct from one another. Jane had strictly self-identified herself as Korean because being American meant being social and vocal; she saw herself as the “stereotypical shy and quiet Asian” type.

Jane: Um, I mean usually probably think of us as the good students because generally there's like the stereotype, that like Asian people are really quiet and like they do

their work and stuff. So generally—but not all the time—like I know plenty of Asian kids who are like the class clowns.

Joan: Hmm.

Jane: But they're usually like the kids that are like very American, so yeah.

Joan: What do you mean by American?

Jane: Uh, like, you know how ... I don't know how to explain it. Like it's a really American thing to ... be like really loud and like laugh a lot and make a lot of jokes about like, I don't know...It's like a pretty American thing. So, that's kind of what I mean...like...social interactions are different.

According to the youths, whites and Asians were also distinctive in how they chose their styles of clothing and fashion. Lillian's portrayals of white counterparts were based on her stereotypes of them, although they were certainly dominant conceptualizations of “popular kids” that have been adopted and shared across Asian youths. The overall image of white students comprised of being rich, dressed in “white gear,” and living a comfortable middle-class lifestyle (interview, 11/27/2019).

It is like guys who wear sporty clothes or like this stereotype is a lot more heavier on girls. Um, like girls who have blonde hair or maybe like always wear makeup, who wear skinny jeans, who always drink Starbucks, who always talk about boys even though I'm pretty sure like most people talk about that. Um, also girls who like are not good academically, who are racist, who don't really know anything about anything but who are rich. I could go on, but yeah.

Danveer mentioned how one of his friends, Ajay, who used to be part of the inner circle among the Indian boys, started to hang out with Ken in the concourse during lunchtime because he wished to be “cool and more like a white f***boy.” He started to dress differently and do his hair in a way that was different from his 9th-grade looks. Ajay now wore a gold chain on his neck and a flannel shirt over several layers of shirts underneath. He also wears a Nike Air Max sneaker and cuts his hair short instead of growing out his natural, curly, black hair like he used to. In Danveer's words, Ajay, who used to “be himself” was now trying hard to be someone he was not. If Danveer attempted to avoid the Indian all-boys group because of its toxicity, Ajay avoided eating in the library with his old crew because it made him far from cool. In the eyes of

the Indian boys, Ajay wanted to be more like his white peers, which was unlike his true self (fieldnotes, 1/3/2020).

Similarly, in Clara's experience, the minute things, from "the types of clothes you wear" to "the type of food you eat" were made into objects of ridicule and mechanisms by which they were marked differently (interview, 11/3/2019).

I guess there's multiple things, but one of them is like material, like the type of clothes you wear and the type of food you eat. I'm like sometimes embarrassed to eat like Asian food and like use chopsticks during lunch. Yeah, and using English with my parents, like when they call me, well, especially when I was younger I was embarrassed to speak in Korean in public and stuff.

Amy also spoke of how she used to be embarrassed by the food her mom packed her for lunch, which she hid from her friends who seemed repulsed and disgusted by them.

Joan: Um, and what are some things that you bring from home? Like your cultural background and practices?

Amy: Like anything? Well, sometimes I'll bring like... for like snack, something Korean or like during lunch I'll bring like something Korean.

Joan: Then what do people think about it?

Amy: They don't think it's weird, but I think it depends on what group you're in. Like my group, they don't really think of it or anything, but some groups that are like extremely ultra-white, they'll be like, 'Ew, what's that?' You know?

(interview, 1/21/2020)

Covert forms of racism compelled Asian youths to constantly think about how they would be seen through the white gaze (Morrison, 1970). Each day, they considered how their Asian-ness would be perceived, and hence, shied away from outwardly being "too Asian" to avoid aggression and racism. Etoile Zhou, a Chinese American girl in the 9th grade, shared stories of how Asian youths are socialized to be perceptive of what others thought of their cultural background and avoided being seen as culturally Asian. This made them "foreign and different" (interview, 11/9/2019). This is what Etoile shared with me,

I saw a kid have this problem, like I don't want to wear Chinese traditional clothes maybe because I'm afraid of how people would see me. My friend, um, when she was little, she

was wearing Chinese traditional clothes and she got spat on by a person walking past. That's like a big part and why she's like, 'Yeah, I don't want to wear that.' It's being ashamed in being Chinese is a lot of subtle things that add up. And then if you make a fuss, like you say, 'Why should I be ashamed of this?' or talk back to someone who might be saying something racist, um, you're seen as sensitive and then as you grow up, you're just like, 'Oh, I don't want to do that.' And you kind of hide yourself and just stop bring the food to school just to not get that treatment. My parents don't really get that because my mom was like, 'I would just stand up to them,' but I wasn't.

Clara's interview demonstrates how Asian youths are in an ongoing process of resisting and blending into the dominant structure of whiteness (Du Bois, 1903; Pollock, 2004b). Clara spoke about being unable to fit anywhere and even feeling embarrassed about her Asian identity. Clara's internalized racism of her perceived foreignness was evident as to why she desired to behave white in the following quote from her interview.

Although I feel like most of us are all like very Americanized and it's hard to show our Asian identity or like sometimes, you're embarrassed about it. I feel like other people have a lot of stereotypes of us. And sometimes [it's] hard to relate with white people, like they talk about things they have in common and stuff. And I pretend like I understand, like I want to understand and like I want to be more funny. (interview, 11/32019)

Time and time again, Asian youths were reminded that being white was considered "cool" and being Asian was something to be ashamed of, Clara was worried about "standing out as Asian" and being judged by the dominant group.

Because since like everybody follows it, I feel like I should too. And if I feel like I would get judged and stuff. There's like particular clothes that I really wanna wear, but I'm sometimes scared to wear them 'cause I feel like people will think I'm like weird...

Although Clara came to terms with her Asianness that led her to be "proud" of her Korean heritage, she still had intense desires to be white. Drawing on Clara's racialized lived emotion and experience, schools have often positioned Asian youths as second-class citizens whose belongingness and positions are conditional and contingent upon the acceptance of whites (S. J. Lee et al., 2017).

Asians as Hyper-Integrated yet Hyper-Visible

Due to perceived foreignness, Asians are considered unassimilable to mainstream society. Yet, Asian youths argued how they are socialized and taught to adopt “American culture” in schools so that they may attempt to seamlessly assimilate into the dominant school culture. Clara asserted how it is difficult for one to avoid being “whitewashed” when the school itself is overwhelmingly white, and minorities fall behind in number. She reflected on how she tried hard to “be white” to fit in, just as other Asians who actively attempted to acculturate and hide their Asian roots, perhaps because they are frequently seen as different and unassimilable. This is what she had to say, “We're a minority here. I feel like... it's like hard not to be, whitewashed here. And I feel like I have to sometimes try to be like white and stuff” (interview, 11/3/2019). When I asked Clara why she had tried so hard to “be white,” this was her response,

I don't know. Sometimes I like want to be American 'cause... mmm, I don't know. I feel like, well, I'm proud to be Korean, but I don't know, I sometimes want to be American because I feel like I would fit in and I don't know. When I was younger, I was like, ‘I want to like be American,’ like even more, I wanted to be white and stuff. Like I thought it would be cool to be white and I was embarrassed about being Asian. But now I feel I'm more proud of it. But I still want to do like more white, I guess.

Owen Lee was the only Korean American staff at Redstone High School and I regularly talked and hung out with him. A common theme of our conversations was how East Asian American youths, Korean Americans in particular, do not tend to flock together in school but instead scatter across “different white groups.” He pinpointed how Korean youths might be peer-pressured to become a “token Asian person,” as opposed to being part of a “cohesive group of Korean Americans in one school” (interview, 11/19/2019).

I don't see too many Korean Americans hanging out together here. They're more pulled into different white groups. Then it's like they feel... I think they feel compelled to do that, and I can see that because I felt that way when I was growing up in a very white town in California... you have more of a... more of that self-pressure to be that token Asian person in the group as opposed to being coping, cohesive group of Korean Americans in one school. Because then if you're... that token Asian in a group of white people, it doesn't feel estranged as being ‘Hey look at that... those are... that's the group

of Korean Americans at our school, they just like to do their own thing.’ And you feel... you alienate yourself more by bonding with other Korean Americans even if you might have an inherent tendency to do so because of the... because you have so many things in common.

Mr. Lee described the pattern of students’ behaviors and interactions in the following vignette:

The solidarity issue is weird. I was most surprised by their...there was two Korean sophomores here...they used to go to Korean Presbyterian church for years. They’re friends. Now I saw them together at church, but I never see them together here. And they’re both sophomores, I never see them together. They have different groups of friends. They both play instruments, they’re both part of youth orchestra. And they probably still... maybe they hang out outside campus, but I don’t see them together here.

He also located the reason for such arrangements of students in the “oppressive” and discriminative culture of the school, which hinders students from asserting their own “cultural identity.” He also pointed to the white parents and communities whom he perceived as having adopted narrow and “myopic” outlooks and minimal exposure to diversity. According to Mr. Lee, white parents heavily influenced not only their children’s interplay between students of color but also the overall school culture and inequities in educational opportunities (Joffe-Walt, 2020; Posey-Maddox, 2014).

That’s just really weird. I don’t get it. But I think it comes back to... the culture in here is hard to recognize that it’s oppressive in the sense that it’s a bigger hindrance here to assert your cultural identity at the school then it is probably at Lakewood and Lincoln High where they’re more accepting, and more embracing, and more curious. Where here, they’re not as curious because they’re probably raised by parents who are more myopic and... um, xenophobia... just like less cultured...I think it all comes down to that, you know. You’re gonna pick up that curiosity from your parents. You could see it from like um, [...] the word when I notices when you have conversations, whether it’s about food or about like... things I wouldn’t think twice about if I were in California talking about certain things. White people in California would just know what I’m talking about. Like here it’s like, ‘What—you don’t know what that is?’ or ‘What—that’s weird?’ or... that’s when you sense it, that’s when you notice these things.

The lack of solidarity observed among Chinese and Korean American students was a recurring topic of conversation as Mr. Lee tried hard to keep his finger on the pulse of the underlying

explanations. He argued how Korean immigrants, in particular, tend to lose their solidarity once they move to the U.S. and acculturate into the dominant society.

There is—which is interesting because there's solidarity in... if you are in Korea. When something big happens like you can't say that—Koreans lacking solidarity in a lot of... in many different contexts it's true—but Asian financial crisis is an example of Korean solidarity in the country. Whereas it triggered everyone to donate their gold, donate their silver, do whatever they can to bring the country back out of the Asian financial crisis. There are many historical examples where Koreans all come together when there's... like something exogenous that pushes the country to come together, right? You know, common battle. But then for some reason outside of that, especially when they immigrate, they avoid each other and... the sense that I always got.

Ethnic solidarity was left out of the question because Asian youths felt the pressure to be the token Asians in white groups (even if it meant being on the periphery of the groups) to fit in.

Sophia mentioned what she had noticed while being in school,

Asians are not cool, you know, people want to talk to, people want to be friends with cool people, like buff, athletic, beautiful and those people always have people around them and that's because people want to be next to them. But I don't think people wanna be next to like Asians. Once you know, it would be different if once you know the person, but before you know the person, they wouldn't try hard to be next to them and start a conversation or have a common... common topic to talk about. (interview, 2/6/2020)

Although Asian youths stood out and were hyper-visible scattered throughout school spaces, teachers had trouble distinguishing them. Students felt self-conscious about being seen as hyper-visible, outnumbering, and overpowering others although Asians were minorities most of the time. This may be the reason Asians felt the urge to become the token Asian students. This is what Clara said,

Yeah, and like a lot of the teachers, if there's two Asian students, they always mix us up even though we look nothing alike, which is like kind of a funny thing, I guess...I feel like I'm not that understood well 'cause I know that I'm super different from them. And like from the teacher, I'm like seen as the same person. So, it's just kind of sad. (interview, 11/3/2019)

In an interview with Jane, she also spoke about how Asian students in general, including her, were not considered popular among their peers as well as their teachers and yet were hyper-

visible. She believed that teachers were often partial to white students who look like them. White students were favored over Asians as they were generally more gregarious and social.

Jane: Um, teachers, I mean, I'm usually like the good student. I don't know. I feel teachers usually favor the white students more or they're like, 'Hey, what's up bro?' towards them. What'd you call it? I forget. They're like closer to them. Like the way they talk and stuff.

Joan: They make small talks?

Jane: Yeah. Yeah. They're not really like that as much with Asian students. I mean they are sometimes depending on the teacher. Um, and then peers.

Joan: Peers?

Jane: And then for peers, uh...if you're like one of the popular white girls, you usually [don't] get talked to a lot. I do not—unless I initiate conversation, but usually it's kind of like awkward, people don't really talk to me.

(interview, 11/5/2019)

The Fetishization of Asian Culture

In recent years, Korean Pop (K-pop) became popular through its global manifestation on American cable TV and talk shows. Although the “Korean wave” and the widespread popular cultures of Asia have played an influential role in countering stereotypes about Asian Americans, the cultural movements were also familiar commodities to the Asian communities. Asian youths were fully aware that their cultures were once again fetishized and spectacularized in the process. They knew that any aspect of the Asian culture, no matter how prevalent and idolized, would not be fully accepted in the eyes of the dominant group. Amy shared how despite the rise and popularity of K-pop, it was still considered exotic and alien in white society.

I feel like K-pop is really [popular], a lot of people are like used to it now. It's just not cool, you know? And especially Redstone, they're like really white and they're more used to like white things. So, a lot of them like think that BTS is so annoying and they're like, 'Omg, they're always on like Jimmy Fallon. It's so annoying.' or like, you know, and some people don't like them 'cause they're not, white or they're not American. You know? And they think that their music is weird or like, the way they talk is weird, like, you know, there's people who's like that. (interview, 1/21/2020)

The derogatory term ‘Koreaboo,’ was used to refer to those who are deeply obsessed with Korean culture. According to my participants, some white ‘Koreaboos’ went as far as

denouncing their own racial/ethnic identities to call themselves Korean. Korean students were far from feeling flattered by this term, and rather, were left feeling marginalized even more. Being labeled as a 'Koreaboo' and/or being associated with the Korean culture was something that was undesired and looked down upon. Amy informed me what the term 'Koreaboo' meant and how she felt about the fascination and fetishization of her culture.

- Joan: How do white kids think about Asian kids, in your opinion?
- Amy: She said that the first time she ever saw me she thought I'd be that kid who like an advisory, like everyone's talking but I'm just like studying, you know, she said that she thought I was one of those kids and she said that she thought I'd probably be one of those like anime lovers and like K-pop, you know, she said that she thought I was one of them.
- Joan: Liking K-pop. Is that not cool?
- Amy: It's like Koreaboo. Do you know what a Koreaboo is?
- Joan: No, I've never heard of that term. Are they people who are like, who has Korean fetish?
- Amy: Kind of, no, it's like, um, there might be like a person who's not Korean, but they're so obsessed with like K-pop, like Korean culture that they like identify as Korean and they try to be like Korean. That's what a Koreaboo is.
- Joan: How would one identify as Korean?
- Amy: I don't know. It just, yeah, it's weird. Or they might like try to speak Korean really poorly and they think they're so good or they try to do like 애교 (aegyo) and they think you're so cute.
- Joan: How does that make you feel?
- Amy: I mean like kids who like K-pop, like I don't have a problem with them. 'Cause I'm like proud of it like, you know, it's my culture, I dunno, but sometimes I'm okay with it, but when they're like Koreaboos, sometimes it's like cringy you know.

'Koreaboo' had come from similar roots as another derogatory term, 'Weeaboo, a label created to refer to those who are fans of Japanese culture, particularly anime. Few Korean American youths were perplexed by the term and the concept underpinning 'Koreaboo.' Though they appreciated the rise of Korean culture and media, they found the fetishization of their culture to be "dehumanizing" and in the same vein as forms of fetishization of Asian women. Melissa Jeong sternly argued, "I think the main issue for me is the fetishizing thing. It's just a little bit creepy and very dehumanizing." She continued her thoughts on this matter.

A lot of it has been involved with K-pop. Which was a really weird experience because freshman year I really like K-pop and I was really into BTS and EXO... that kind of thing. And then I met a lot of people that liked K-pop, which was a 'Yes, I like people who like it for the culture and for the music' and I noticed throughout the years that there is a lot people who have fetishized like the Asians. I met this underclassman who like... it was bad. She just came up to me and speak Korean to me [...] it's like a Koreaboo and there's a difference of person who wants to learn Korean, I guess. And one time, me and Sophia were walking in the hallway and this group of kids—I think they were freshmen—they were following us and "Yo we want to talk to you, my friend really likes Asians" and they kept on following us and we were like "Please stop following us." We were kind of scared so we kept walking away and they kept on following us... we were like 'That's spooky', and dipped into a classroom. (interview, 2/25/2020)

Zee An, a Chinese American female student whose hobby was watching Japanese anime, asserted how Asian cultures were looked down upon by whites. She told me how the creation and usage of the derogatory slang, 'Weeaboo' demonstrates that those who are fanatically consumed by Japanese culture are seen as undesirable and disliked. While some white youths consumed Asian cultures, there were other whites who saw 'Weeaboos' and 'Koreaboos' as strange and eccentric.

- Zee: And it kind of reveals itself in a way, like certain Americans will look down on Asian culture, like anime, people are like, 'Oh, you're a Weeaboo, ew.' I'm like, 'Okay, but you like cartoons, right? Like American cartoons. It's basically the same, except it's Japanese.' So why?
- Joan: Did you say weeaboo?
- Zee: Yeah, but you do know what that means?
- Joan: No, I only heard of Koreaboo.
- Zee: It's basically a person who really likes anime. It's kind of a disparaging term. It's like you're so obsessed with Japanese culture... There's definitely this negative connotation behind it... Yeah. Oh, it plays into the weird vaguely racist things that appear in mainstream media that isn't so overt that you can immediately point it out and be like, why are you saying this? This is racist. It's so subtle that most people just don't notice it.

(interview, 4/25/2020)

Amy described her white friends who would be considered 'Weeaboos' and 'Koreaboos' as "those BTS, army, K-pop, anime lovers who study a lot...kind of quiet" (interview, 1/21/2020).

Amy spoke of how even the white students who are into K-pop and/or Japanese anime

themselves were conscious of how they were not considered popular and likable. The “Koreaboos” and “Weeaboos” knew that their obsessions were something to be shameful of. The white students with the highest status did not consume Asian popular culture and looked down upon those who did.

Also, there are a lot of kids who like K-pop but they like hide it ‘cause they're like embarrassed about it because it's not considered cool. So, there's kids like that. *생각보다 좋아하는 애들이 많은데* [There are a lot more who enjoys K-pop than you know], but they don't talk about it or like say it ‘cause they're embarrassed about it.

Asian youths, including Lillian, were aware that Asians were commonly seen as anime-lovers who are “lame” and “nerdy.” The East and South Asian participants in my study were hyper-vigilant about how they were perceived by their peers and teachers, whether it was because of their love for Japanese anime and/or K-pop, characteristics that made them too Asian, or even the lack of athleticism.

I think I get along pretty well with people in general, although sometimes people think...I think they think that I'm like lame, but it's fine ‘cause I didn't really talk to those people... not so popular people ... I would say, things that people consider...lame or like nerdy, like people who watch anime, I watch anime, but I'm not really like one of those stereotypical people when they think of anime people watching anime, they think of like a certain group of people at our school. And um, also people who don't do sports, especially for guys. You know what it's interesting? Like the so-called popular people and the non-popular people, I'm pretty sure they have like about the same number of friends. It's just how they're perceived, I guess, by the school or like the school population. (interview, 11/27/2019)

Racial and Social Isolation

Despite the many efforts of Asian youths to fit into the dominant culture, students continued to feel socially isolated within school spaces. However, it was found that among the study participants, East Asian youths spoke more about racial and social isolation than South Asian youths. My findings mirror studies such as Suh & Satcher (2005) since Asian students reported incidents of feeling mistreated, inferior, inadequate, and isolated. The study presented

factors contributing to feelings of alienation, which occur as a consequence of discrimination by schoolteachers and administrators, peer harassment, and cultural discrepancies between the school and home environment (Suh & Satcher, 2005). G. C. Park (2011) found that Korean immigrants in his study faced “status marginalization and social isolation in the high school’s racial hierarchy” (p. 621) and were cognizant of the idea that they could never be accepted as “true” Americans. Similarly, the youths in my study believed that Asians were socially isolated as they were presumed to be incapable of assimilating into the dominant society. This is what Jane mentioned,

- Jane: They're usually more distant. They're not mean, they're just more distant.
 Joan: Oh, so both teachers and peers, are distant towards Asian students?
 Jane: Yeah, I mean teachers are a little less, but like students especially, can be a little more distant unless you're like, what'd you call it? unless you're like, culturally you're really American... you just moved here or something, they usually like ignore you because I know my friend, she gets ignored. People barely know her name. No one ever really tries to talk to her unless they have to...like in a group assignment or something?

(interview, 11/5/2019)

When James Yoon was asked whether he was discriminated against by his peers, he told me how, ever since his early schooling years in Texas, he was socially isolated from his white peers in school. He spoke about his feelings of social exclusion and isolation that continued throughout his high school years at Redstone High. He stated that these feelings of isolation were not unique to particular regions or demographics, but rather, were common racialized experiences observed across all Asian youths, who were informed that such strife is unique to their communities and is integral to the perpetual foreigner stereotype that racially shapes their day-to-day lives.

- James: When I was really young, I was in like Texas and Virginia [...] the good schools were like primarily surrounded mostly by white people. So, I think I, if not anything else, I was of like socially isolated but I guess it got a little better when I moved to Wisconsin or moved back to Wisconsin.

Joan: Would you say it's because Wisconsin is more diverse?

James: I think, well one I guess, things haven't really changed that much since I still like mainly surround myself with Asian people. Um, two, I guess it is because it's a bit more liberal, like specifically within like at least like middle to high school. So yeah, that could also play a part and three, I think it's like, just because like the school is a bit more diverse. Like even though it's like some like crazy things, like 95% of the students are white, it's like still bit better than at least Texas, like Virginia.

(interview, 1/21/2020)

Amy and others believed that Asian students were socially isolated and were constantly wrestling with the need to fit in so that they may be accepted by their white peers. In contrast, white students would not be consumed by such worries as they had no trouble fitting into groups and spaces that were largely occupied by diverse groups such as Asians (e.g., the orchestra and debate club).

I feel like...there's also like some white kids that are with them but like they all like hang out together, you know... the music kids will hang out together but most of the music kids are like Asian but there's like some white kids that are music kids but it's only some of them so like, you know, and then like the debate kids will hang out with the debate kids and... the book club kids will hang out with the book club kids, you know.
(interview, 1/21/2020)

Cho and Bae (2005) found Korean American adolescents to have emotional problems due to acculturative stress, which made them feel a sense of alienation, isolation, and psychological distress. During their acculturative process, poor self-esteem, severe conflict with parents, and lack of strong bonds with peers were additional strong predictors of emotional problems (Cho & Bae, 2005). Additionally, Yeh et al.'s (2005) study found that Korean American students struggled with complex issues that included pressures to meet parental expectations, use different languages at home and school, negotiate contradicting cultural values, move across various cultural spaces, and manage relationships with co-ethnic peers, Asian peers, and non-Asian peers. Similarly, despite the students' desire to negotiate and navigate hybrid spaces along networks of cultures, they felt incapable of achieving this successfully. They were challenged

with the task to negotiate the contradictory expectations across the various social spaces of home, school, and community, ultimately causing them to feel racially and socially isolated from the dominant society.

One of the most significant examples of the internalization of the perpetual foreigner stereotype emerged in an interview with Lillian. Although her mother is a professor of economics at a local university and her father worked remotely for a tech company, she spoke about how her immigrant family would be excluded from the “social network” of white parents. She stated how the perpetual foreigner stereotype was passed down through generations despite the longstanding history of Asian immigrant families residing in the U.S. She knew how Asians were always attributed as foreign and “other.”

So, if there was a school that was like 80% white then like if I were walking through the halls and all I saw was just white people everywhere, I would feel like so uncomfortable because it'd be like ‘Where all my Asians at?’ And also, I would like stand out a lot and I feel like people would always be like looking at me and like judging me and I feel like I just would be an outsider because all the white people would have, like their grandparents wouldn't have known each other and gone to school together. Well for me, out here with my parents who moved here like 20 years ago would not be part of that social network. Uh, also, some Asian Americans who are not second generation immigrants, but in fact like their parents came here back in like the 1900 or like the early 1900s or like 1800s, they would feel like left out of because of white people culture and also out of Asian people culture, I feel because um, it's like kind of expected, I guess that Chinese Americans would like speak Chinese and like I know I'm always surprised when the Chinese American doesn't speak Chinese. So, if that person is like not second generation but like ninth generation, they would feel like [they're] caught in between. (interview, 11/27/2019)

Anti-Asian Racism

Anti-Asian Xenophobia

As previously mentioned in the section on researcher positionality in chapter two, I have also experienced anti-Asian racism while in the field. The most prominent racist attitudes and behaviors I witnessed firsthand were students’ slanted eye gestures directed at myself and other

Asians (fieldnotes, 9/19/2019), mockery of Ms. Huang Huan's English pronunciations (fieldnotes, 9/23/2019), endorsements of bigotry and ideologies of the Make American Great Again (MAGA) movement (fieldnotes, 9/23/2019), common racist remarks about Asians, and a white supremacy hand gesture signaled amongst white peers directed at racially minoritized students (fieldnotes, 10/12/2020). Although I have also observed students of color holding racist and colorist views that are more subtle but equally damning, I noted that white students were encouraged to practice overt forms of hatred and prejudice under former president Donald J. Trump's administration during the school year.

This section presents how Asian American youths continue to face anti-Asian racism in various forms under the mechanics of white supremacy. An example of explicit forms of hate toward Asians and Asian Americans was highlighted after the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a pandemic in March 2020. Asians, specifically the Chinese, were blamed for the outbreak. Ever since, Asian communities across the world experienced an increase in targeted violence. The anti-Asian xenophobia and Sinophobia, which have been present since the first migrant workers set foot on U.S. soil, were used to validate discriminatory acts against Asians. Melissa elaborated on an event where she was singled out as someone who had COVID-19 because of her perceived Asian identity.

I think the coronavirus also plays a large role in like this fear... this... xenophobic kind of attitude that they have. I remember I was coughing one time and this person, this girl turned around with her friend and like "Oh my God, does she have coronavirus" and I was like—this was a big power move of mine—I turned to them, I coughed, I was like "Yeah, I do have corona. What about it?" She was like, "Oh my God" and then like she turned around. I just kept on coughing... (interview, 2/25/2020)

As shown below, Asians were blamed for carrying foreign viruses and perceived as a threat to the western way of life. The xenophobic portrayal of Asian Americans as the "yellow peril,"

signifying those who are dirty and uncivilized, was used to scapegoat the Asian citizens of the United States. This is what Sunny had to say,

So, I heard stories from Chinese school, [from] the students and parents. Um, there, there's some people out there who think that because of this [coronavirus], Asians are like just like bad and stuff, like they're the ones that causing everyone to get sick and kind of discriminated against. (interview, 3/12/2020)

However, long before the coronavirus epidemic in 2019, Asian youths were already facing anti-Asian xenophobia rooted in the enduring American history of perceiving Asians as carriers of viruses and foreign entities. Elsie shared,

...They would say like, 'Where are you from?' And they'd be like, 'Oh, I'm from the U.S. and like, 'No, but where are you really from?' So, they'd say things like that or, um...I know...there's this, my friend Kris, she has some kid in her social studies class, and they said like 'Those dang Chinese people aren't washing their hands' or something like that. (interview, 3/14/2020)

On a similar note, Asians were not only seen as unclean and disgusting but also as barbaric and uncivilized, deeming them inherently undesirable and un-American. Melissa stated,

Um, another instance is that like this coworker of mine—she was in my high school—she was white [...] she'll just made a comment about like Asian people in general when I was like standing right there, she was like "Tik Tok is run by the Chinese government which is so weird" and then she like made another joke about Asians eating dogs or something and then me and my friend looked at each other and we're like "She really just say that?" (interview, 2/25/2020)

Everyday Aggressions Toward Asian American Youths

Asian students experienced both overt forms of discrimination (such as verbal harassment) as well as its covert forms, which include racial stereotypes and subtle forms of racism. The data from the study observations demonstrate that Asian American students frequently encounter explicit forms of anti-Asian racism and discrimination. Research highlights Asian American youths as more likely to become victims of race- or ethnicity-related hate speech (Cooc & Gee, 2014) than other groups. Unsurprisingly, I have witnessed, from my

observations of East and South Asian youths, the use of racial slurs such as “ching ching man,” “yellow man,” “Kung Fu Panda,” “Aladdin,” and “ISIS.” My data demonstrates how Asian American boys in particular could be vulnerable to emasculation. Furthermore, Clara, among others, was pejorative of how Asians were subjected to bullying and racial harassment due to phenotypic features such as slanted eyes and other racial stereotypes directed toward Asians. Undoubtedly, Asian youths were targets of pervasive racial phenotypic stereotypes—whether overt or covert.

I feel like we have more, in my opinion, I feel like we have more...stereotypes on culture, I guess. I feel like we have the most stereotypes. Like we have like small eyes, and we like eat dog and stuff and um, I feel like our culture is the most like I don't know how to explain... Because like on social media and stuff, I always see a bunch of like jokes about Asian people and like at school, people like speak in Asian accents and stuff and they make fun of it. (interview, 11/3/2019)

Amy's description of how Asians are ridiculed for their Asian English accents and “broken” English is a common depiction of the perceived foreignness of Asians that has been normalized in society. They were often subjugated to being marked as foreign, based on their manner of speaking. Unfortunately, they also learned to become immune to casual and subtle racism, although some chose self-deprecating humor as a self-defense mechanism.

Amy: Not harassment, but like sometimes kids will be like eating sushi and kids I don't know, they'll be like using chopsticks and one time, this girl came up to me and she was like, ‘Am I doing this right?’ You know, just things like that and um, sometimes they're like racist but they don't know that they're racist and everyone is like that. If I speak up about it, then I become the person who's wrong ‘cause everyone, you know? Yeah. And sometimes people with white kids like imitate like an Asian person or something like that. But I can't do anything about it ‘cause everyone is just like ‘Haha.’ And if I like speak up about it, they're all going to be like, ‘Oh she's so sensitive. She's so...’ you know.

Joan: How do they imitate an Asian person?

Amy: They might imitate like the Asian person's accent. Do you know like the way my parents talk? They have like, I don't even know how to explain it either, but like...

Joan: Are you talking about Konglish?

- Amy: No, it's not Konglish. It's like imagine saying and writing hello, but write it in Korean and then read that in Korean. 헬로 [hello]. Like broken English or like for a Chinese, they might imitate like a Chinese person or like a Vietnamese person.
- Joan: Have you ever stood up to like the kids who make fun of Asian accents?
- Amy: Yeah, but not like, so, very lightly I guess. For example, if something like that is like happening, but if it's between people I know than I will be like, 'Oh my god, that's so' you know, but like, I'd be like, just kind of lightly be like, that's like 'That's like not cool' you know...

(interview, 1/21/2020)

Silencing of Anti-Asian Racism

Clara pointed out how teachers are also complicit in anti-Asian racism when they fail to intervene to reproach those who make racist remarks, insults, and slurs. Few students understood teachers' lack of intervention and silence as their complicity in racism.

In eighth grade, um, we held like a unit in history on like Asia and we were like talking, uh, learning about China and then our teacher was like making a list of what we knew about China and she was like calling on people and this one guy was like, um, 'They eat dog' and the teacher didn't say anything about it. And then this other guy made this weird joke, it was about like Asian burger or something. And he was like, 'Oh, it's probably made out of Asian people.' I was like, 'What?' Yeah, but I feel like teachers, like when people are fooling around and stuff, they like tell them to stop and stuff but if it's like, um, a racial joke or anything, they usually don't really do anything. (interview, 11/3/2019)

Even teachers, at times, joined students in making racial jokes about Asian stereotypes—the smart, quiet, shy, and docile archetypes. Although Clara added that she does not feel “offended by it,” she did mention that she kept it to herself to cope with the compounded racism. As previously mentioned in chapter four, Asians were often overgeneralized as compliant and good-behaving students. Throughout my participant observation in the school, I witnessed how Asian youths conceded to racial harassment and intimidation, not because they wanted to, but since they were expected to “take the high road” as submissive beings across racial groups.

I feel like a lot of them think that we're like, like naturally super smart and um, like shy and stuff. 'Cause I'm like super shy and teachers like sometimes make small jokes about it. Like I don't really get offended by it a lot. (interview, 11/3/2019)

The voices and experiences of Asian American youths, in the context of their suffering and racism, were frequently invalidated, thereby prompting them to brush off remarks ranging between slights and overt racial slurs. Most participants mentioned experiences of being harassed and attacked by racial slurs, very few of them were perceived as mild jokes that make them uncomfortable. These students made sense of the racial jokes as stemming from the immaturity of their peers rather than any distinct hatred against Asians. Even when Amy explained her observation of varying forms of discrimination against Asians, she did not fully comprehend others' experiences based on acts of hate, despite her accounts being rather vivid and extensive.

Amy: Some people they don't like Asians, you know, so they might not be very nice to them...

Joan: Teachers or students?

Amy: Oh, just like in general.

Joan: Oh. Why wouldn't they like Asians?

Amy: They're just those types of people, you know, who think that white people are better than um...

Joan: So, is that racism?

Amy: Yeah, not hatred but they look down on us or they expect a lot of things from us and things like that.

(interview, 1/21/2020)

As the academic achievements of Asian Americans are perceived to match up with or even exceed those of their white counterparts, it is widely believed that they no longer suffer from discrimination and/or structural barriers (Chou & Feagin, 2015). Consequently, the victimization of Asian American students as collective incidents of racism was an issue that is typically overshadowed by the academic performance of the group (Cooc & Gee, 2014). The collective victimization and the various forms in which Asian Americans were bounded by the fetters of racism had been neglected at interpersonal, institutional, and structural levels in Redstone High. Elsie shared her insight with me during her interview:

It was my junior year and was minding my own business. We were in honors physics and I was just doing my homework in class because we had homework time and I think one

of the people behind me—I don't like him anymore—he was whispering to the other girl, she is also Asian, they were whispering 'Look at her she's being such a good Chinese girl. She's doing her work, gosh she's so smart, she thinks she is better than everyone' and they were making fun of my eyes... I was like that's so mean. You could have a little more advanced remarks if your gonna say something. That is mainly what happened and obviously there are other things that happened. It's really weird. It's like... I've had a mixed experience here. (interview, 3/14/2020)

East and South Asian youths alike were compelled to dilute their experiences of racism as they experienced their voices being “shot down” by others due to model minority stereotypes and the perceived Asian relative privilege. As such, they were taught to perceive the discriminatory acts as much less severe, relative to those encountered by their Black and Brown counterparts, which have indirectly led to a greater invalidation of their voices and experiences. This is what Etoile had to say,

The model minority thing, I think that's amazing. Like, um, you don't see that for other racial groups. And then there's also this thing that a lot of people think, people of color on top are the Asian Americans and below all the other people of color, that kind of thing, that Asian Americans are better. Obviously, that's not true, but it's a big thing. And so other people of color might think like you don't face, um, racism or oppression as much as they do. And then so when we complain about it, it's often shot down. That's a big thing I've seen. (interview, 11/9/2019)

Etoile continued to share her observations about how white supremacy has led groups of minorities to build resentment toward one another and go against each other.

...Because Chinese American families are often more privileged, um, they don't, they don't face as much. So, when they complain about racism, there's often that, um, clash between Asian Americans and mainly Black and Hispanic people. Like 'You don't face oppression as much as we do.' I forgot what that logic was but it was ... it basically came down to like, you can't complain. Um, and that sort of makes you sad because ... hmm, you're going through with these things, but you're kind of getting hit by both sides. That sort of invalidate those claims or experiences. And you'll also see these, these two, the Asian and other racial groups clashing and fighting each other, which is sad because they're all facing systematic oppression from the white people, not people of color. (interview, 11/9/2019)

Asian American students recognized that they were not the main targets of anti-Blackness, but rather, were positioned as a racial wedge between the whites and Blacks. Few

students have witnessed people who are not Black (e.g., white students and one particular white teacher) “casually dropping the N-word and how school staffs and teachers discriminate Black and Brown students” in ways that “made Asian students feel uncomfortable” being trapped in beleaguered tensions from white and Black racial conflicts. Students in the study mentioned how Asian students tend to be bystanders in such events because they “know that it could be a lot worse,” meaning they could “end up being treated like their Black and Brown peers” (fieldnotes, 1/17/2020). Ignoring signs of aggression and discounting the experiences of racism as isolated incidents were common coping strategies for Asian youths while dealing with racism to reassure themselves that they are treated “better” and in a position of relative privilege than their Black and Brown counterparts.

However, few participants in my study could discern the damage caused by anti-Blackness to Asian communities as well. Although Asians seem to possess relative “privilege” compared to outright anti-Black racism, anti-Blackness remains steeped in Asian experiences, directly affecting Asian youths as victims of racial profiling. On the subject of anti-Asian racism, Farid relayed an incident where his brother was racially profiled and arraigned for arson due to his dark brown skin tone as an Indian American. He was right to make sense of the incident as a consequence of discrimination, colorism, and racial profiling (Glenn, 2009; Hunter, 2005, 2007).

Erasure of Asian Representation

Asian students frequently spoke about the void in representation of Asian stories, ancestral history of Asian migration and domiciliation, cultural heritage, and prominent contributions to the U.S. at school (An, 2016). Asian American youths in the study alluded to the AAPI curricular erasure (Chong, 2021) and the lack of diverse portrayal of Asian histories in textbooks and curriculums (Chong, 2021) as a form of violence (An, 2020; Hsieh & J. Kim,

2020). Though schools may be ambivalent towards such invisibility of fair representation of Asian Americans in curriculum (Goodwin, 2010), An (2020) underscores it as an unambiguous form(s) of anti-Asian racism. Amy asserted,

So, I think they should work on bringing more diversity. And more like...for example, at Lakeview High, they have a lot of like cultural things. Like they have a really, really big culture night and they have like clubs that are related to things like that. But I feel like at Redstone High, they don't have like at Lakeview, they always have a night where there's like a bunch of, all the different cultures, like makes food and you can like try all the food and experience things and they bring things from their culture to share. But I feel like, and it's like a really big night and it's a big important event. But I feel like at Redstone High, there isn't something like that and there aren't like a lot of clubs that are like that. (interview, 1/21/2020)

Indeed, both East and South Asian students understood the exclusion of their historical roots and culture from formal and informal curricula as an invalidation of their historical roots. Clara spoke about feeling neglected due to the school's lack of efforts toward incorporating her culture into classrooms.

Clara: I'd really like it if they like knew more about like our culture and connect with us about it. I feel like that would make me feel really good and more proud of my thing—more proud of my background and if they talked more about things in other countries, I feel like I'll feel super included and stuff like that.

Joan: Yeah.

Clara: Like last year, my history teacher, she was really interested in Korea, so like, um, she like always asked me about it and stuff and one time she played K-pop. It was like super old music, but I don't know, I just really liked that, that she tried.

(interview, 11/3/2019)

Pradeep was also apprehensive about the lack of true reflection of all communities in class materials.

I think a lot of the minorities, they don't feel themselves reflected in the system. Like I said, a lot of the history that we talk about in history classes about white culture and white history, you don't talk about other stuff. We talk a lot about like the founding fathers and everything. We don't talk about how America was built on the back of slaves and stuff. You don't talk a lot about that. (interview, 11/27/2019)

Jane explained how during three years of her social studies and history classes were primarily rooted in Eurocentrism and white-centric education.

Jane: Oh, in their social studies unit, they should go over more places because in modern world history, we just went over Europe and America and I was like, ‘Okay, I’ve heard the same story like 5 million times. Oh my God.’ Like kind of wish they go over more international things...

Joan: As in...?

Jane: Like parts of Asia because there’s a lot of parts of Asia that I do not know the history of ... because they don’t go over it ever. And I kind of wish they did that...or cover over more international topics instead of just like this same topic that we’ve heard about for like our whole lives.

(interview, 11/5/2019)

The exclusion of Asian history, culture, and language marked such subject matters as un-American and irrelevant to the curriculum content in the broader context of nation-building.

Therefore, many students thought of class content and material that was not white-Eurocentric as “not American.” The following quote is from Jane’s interview,

Trying to involve more stuff from different places, like don’t go over the revolutionary war for like the 200th time. Like I know George Washington and I know... I kinda wanna learn something new that’s not American. And maybe like languages, they could offer more languages because... not a lot of high schools offer Mandarin as a language, so I was like kind of surprised they offered it here because usually it’s just like German, French—not even sometimes German—like Spanish, French, whatever else there is, but yeah, I feel like more...I’ve never been to a school that offers, um, is it Hindi?

Students also voiced the lack of diversity and representation among faculty and staff at Redstone High, which mitigated feelings of invalidation and exclusion among Asian American youths. They felt as though they were isolated because the school is void of teachers of color who could provide racial solidarity and support.

Joan: Um, would it help you if there are more Asian teachers in the school?

Jane: Yeah, I’ve like never seen an Asian teacher.

Joan: Mr. Lo!

Jane: Yeah. I haven’t met. There’s like Mr. Lo and there’s ... I think this is the most number of Asian teachers I’ve ever seen.

Joan: There’s three.

- Jane: Yeah. In this school at least like, I was kind of surprised. It was just like, ‘Oh my God, there's so many,’ even though they're only like three but, I mean that's a lot, I'd say.
- Joan: Um, is that better than having none?
- Jane: Yeah, I guess if there's none, then I don't know, it just feels kind of isolated.
- Joan: Would you be able to connect with Asian teachers more?
- Jane: Uh, yes, because there are like certain things that we understand more. I don't like flush her when she's talking about holidays in China and stuff. Like I can kind of understand it more because there's some similar holidays and stuff in Korea, or like culture wise.

The underrepresentation of the “invisible subjects within these predominantly white spaces” (Trieu & H. C. Lee, 2018, p. 72) left Asian teachers concerned about the racial inequality and negative toll on the Asian students in the school. One of the two female Asian teachers in the school, Ms. Huang Huan, who taught Mandarin, mentioned how Asian students have been consistently left out in conversations around equity in teacher meetings and professional development. She spoke about how the school focused on putting its modest efforts toward advancing Black and Brown success, yet Asians were “always left out of the conversation” around equity. She said, “Asian students are seen as performing well but we are invisible.” She also mentioned how she was pleased to know that I was conducting a study on Asian students because there are times when “Asianness becomes simultaneously hyper-visible and -invisible” (fieldnotes, 9/23/2019).

Psychological Injuries of Racial Trauma

Studies demonstrate common sources of mental health symptoms such as distress, anxiety, and stress, which are entrenched in pressures to live up to the model minority stereotype, parents’ expectations, notions of academic success (Gupta et al., 2011; S. Lee et al., 2009; Qin, et al., 2008), family obligations and duties rooted in strong cultural values (S. Lee et al., 2009), the need to move across varying cultures (S. Lee et al., 2009; Qin, et al., 2008; Yoon et al., 2017), perception of racism, discriminatory prejudices, and bullying (S. Y. Kim, et al., 2011; D.

L. Lee & Ahn, 2011; Shin et al., 2011; Sue et al., 2009). In the research study by Choi et al. (2006), the Asian American group was found to score one of the highest levels of social stress and family conflicts; relative to whites, Asian Americans had a lower level of self-esteem.

Asian Fatigue

From day-to-day anti-Asian racism, whether overt or covert, Asian youths experience fatigue and exhaustion as they struggle to embody the stereotypes that prompt them to be generally compliant. Similar to the term, Black fatigue (Winters, 2020), Asians were also prone to fatigue, compounded by intergenerational pain, injury, weariness, and suffering that comes from living with racism each day. However, I specifically refer to the social, emotional, and mental fatigue unique to the experiences of Asian Americans, as Asian fatigue.

- Joan: What are the challenges and hardships of being Korean or Korean American?
 Jane: Um, well it's hard to find people that relate to you because of like different households and stuff. Um, and usually people kind of have stereotypes about you. Like there are more stereotypes ...
 Joan: What kind of stereotypes?
 Jane: Like 'They're smart, they're quiet, they're like kind of antisocial. They study a lot.'
 Joan: And how does that make you feel?
 Jane: [Tears up]
 Joan: Sorry.
 Jane: Oh, no, no, no, no, it's okay. I'm just like, I'm used to it, so I don't think about it that much. If anyone ever came up to me and like, said one of the things, those things I'd be like, 'Okay, we have different personalities.' Like not every person is the same.

(interview, 11/5/2019)

Since students are faced with having to conform to the subtle cultural dimensions of whiteness and the white gaze, the negative consequences are manifested through experiences of psychological distress and anxiety. Students in this research discussed being relentlessly self-conscious of how their white peers and teachers perceived them. As someone who placed great value on peer relationships, Sophia was more direct with me in how she felt “empty” and depressed from being unable to truly fit in and befriend people who are white.

During sophomore year when I didn't have friends, I were... I had a lot of friends in Korea, and when I came here I didn't have any friends. So that difference made be really empty, feel empty and depressing because I've always thought that friends are very important, that always had biggest proportion in my life. (interview, 2/6/2020)

Sophia also mentioned how having to interact with white people “exhausted” her. Considering the various accounts regarding the perceptions developed by whites of herself resulted in a toll on her socioemotional health. She mentioned the white gaze as she described the constant pressure to measure up against the normative standard of whiteness.

I definitely feel more comfortable talking to other races than white because... I don't know, I feel like I just don't have common topic to talk about with white people. Because they [inaudible] and they talk too fast... Yeah, I don't know, it's just me but I'm kind of scared of talking to white people because I think about how people would perceive me and how people would think about me.

In several interviews, I observed how youths made attempts to suppress their distress by evading conversations about their social relationship with white peers and teachers. During an interview with Sunny, her emotions ran high: “I would say it has gone better because when I moved from China to here, I... my English wasn't really good, and yeah. Can we not answer this?” (interview, 3/12/2020) Just as Christine evaded issues of racial injustices during her interview, she recoiled and avoided talking about anti-Asian racism altogether.

Joan: Have you had any instances where you thought you were being discriminated?

Christine: No, there might've been a time, but I don't really remember, and I probably was like, just like wanting to be in my shell and not talk about it and stuff.

(interview, 2/12/2020)

Once again, in the context of living up to the expectations white people have of Asians, some individuals brought up the issue of anxiety and distress exacerbated by the pressure to meet high educational expectations and performing well in terms of academics (Warikoo, 2022).

During my conversation with James, he lamented about how Asians cannot escape the many

struggles that are unique to them, particularly with regard to their negotiations with the model minority status.

I feel like a lot of like Asian American students are like constantly bombarded by pressure from like both society and from their past experiences, so I think...I feel like there isn't like a good way to solve all these problems. (interview, 1/21/2020)

Difficulty Seeking Help

Among the study participants, Jane Yang, who suffered from depression and anxiety, was attending Intensive Outpatient Treatment (IOP) programs to treat her symptoms during my fieldwork. A few times each week, she left school early to attend counseling sessions during school hours. She was rather forthright with me in her accounts of suicidal ideation and events leading up to her decision to seek help. The following is an account of her experiences.

So, I was having... a lot of ... like suicidal thoughts and stuff. So, I had been having them, I had them for a few, like two years, like ever since sixth grade. And that was kind of when they started after the whole friend thing and they kind of like stuck around and then they just kind of kept getting worse over the years. Until eventually I was like, 'Okay, screw it, I'm just gonna do it.' Like I had a whole plan and very detailed. And I was like doing research on it and trying to figure out what was like the best thing to use and et cetera, et cetera. So that's when I was kinda like, 'Okay, I should probably talk to someone.' So, that's what I did. (interview, 11/5/2019)

Although numerous factors may have contributed to her mental illness, she identified her racially abusive friend as someone who played a key role in this context. Jane's story presents a clear example that Asian Americans indeed face racism.

Once, my friend got really mad at me and she ignored me. And then she would like tell me that I was like, (inaudible) she said, she wanted me to die and she was like, 'I hate that you're breathing' and all this stuff. And she called me like—I forget, there was like this one thing, uh, she talked to other people about me, while I was there, so like purposefully talking about me and she was like, 'Oh, she's such like a good Chinese girl, like sitting and like being quiet and she's such like an obedient dog.' It was so bad. So, I'm not friends with her anymore obviously but like that happened.

She reflected upon how she was very withdrawn and had kept her struggles to herself from a very young age. She could no longer occlude the wounds that were compounded by events, regardless of their severity, that led to race-based traumatic stress.

Um, I don't know, like I think as a kid I'd always just kind of kept everything inside. I don't know why or what caused it, but it's just thing I kind of did and I think I was worried about, I don't know, I just wasn't very open emotionally.

Findings show that, compared to other minority groups, Asian Americans lack the necessary resources to overcome mental distress. We observe a pattern of Asian American youths being disproportionately underrepresented in mental health programs and interventions in America (S. Lee et al., 2009). In the case of Korean American youths, this is explained by how most members of the group fail to recognize the importance of receiving proper psychological help or early intervention from mental health professionals despite having the poorest mental health among all Asian American adolescents, and approximately 40% of Korean American adolescents experiencing depressive symptoms (E. Kim & Cain, 2008). Studies show that they tend to turn to non-mental health professionals, such as friends, religious leaders, and physicians for support (Cheung et al., 2011) instead of appropriate mental health professionals.

Though Jane eventually opened up to seek help, her Korean parents were dismissive of her mental state and disapproved of her attending treatment programs. As suggested by previous literature, even when Asian youths are cognizant of their mental health problems, they struggle with the familial and societal disapproval of mental health services. Cultural values deeply rooted in the teachings of Confucianism shape how Koreans view mental health and social behavior (S.-Y. Park & Bernstein, 2008). The cultural significance of collectiveness and honor is observed across extended families and ethnic communities; showing signs of weakness or asking for help, particularly with regard to mental health, can be regarded as bringing dishonor to the

family name, and therefore, something that must be obscured (Bernstein, 2007; Cheung et al., 2011). Furthermore, the underutilization of proper help from outside resources is impacted by cultural behaviors such as the tendency to not express emotions and preferences for managing emotional distress through self-care practices rather than professional help (S.-Y. Park & Bernstein, 2008). The following section of Jane's interview illustrates how she was kept from seeking professional help regarding her depressive disorder due to cultural beliefs and expectations.

Joan: Was your family supportive of you going to IOP?

Jane: Uh, well I used to go to IOP. So they were like real shook that I needed to go in the first place. Um, me going to the hospital was like, they were really against it.

Joan: They were against it?

Jane: Yeah, they were—not against it, but they were very just like, 'Oh, you'll be fine. You don't need that.' And they're like very afraid of uh, like my mental health condition and stuff because I know Korea isn't very open about stuff like that. So, they were like, my dad was convinced that I wanted to go there because of like, 'I wanted to be like the kids on TV' and I was like, 'No.'

Joan: Um, can you tell me about the incident when you got hospitalized?

Jane: Yeah, so basically, I had like a whole plan. I didn't actually do anything, but a whole plan and they said that was like pretty bad and I was like afraid that if I didn't get into... intervention that I do something stupid. So, I told the school counselor and then they took me to the ER and stuff. So that's what happened.

Joan: Oh, when you were at school?

Jane: Yeah. Well, I mean, I decided just because like going to my parents just directly was kind of scary and they probably wouldn't really get me the help I need because they don't know how to handle stuff like that. So, I just told the school counselor.

Joan: What'd you tell the counselor?

Jane: Counselor? Oh, I was just like, 'Oh, I'm like really worried because uh, like I think I have issues, like I've been feeling this way for a while and I feel like if I don't do anything now then I'm going to do something bad.' And I like started crying and stuff and she was like, 'Oh my God.' So she was like, 'We're gonna call your parents.'

Joan: And then you went to the ER.

Jane: Yeah.

Joan: And then what happened after that?

Jane: Oh, after that I was admitted into, uh, inpatient for eight days? [...] And I was there for eight days and then I got out.

Joan: Do you think you made a wise decision?

Jane: Yeah, I think I did at least because I'm definitely a lot happier than I was last year.

(interview, 11/5/2019)

Coping with Racial Trauma and the Importance of Ethnic Solidarity

Racially minoritized students tend to stick to peers from the same racial/ethnic groups while navigating across white spaces. Indian American students at Redstone High flocked to their own ethnic groups and felt a sense of acceptance and validation both within and outside of school spaces. As cultural beings, students sought their own “people” to tackle the immensely hybridized space (Bhabha, 1994; Gutiérrez et al., 1999; Soja, 1996) as minorities who had to negotiate between their culture and white culture. This is what Sarah revealed,

I'd say my favorite part of school, it's like, kind of just going there and seeing all my friends 'cause then it's like, I have a support system, you know, like I have people genuinely care about me. That's not just legally obliged people who like have to care about me. It's like people who've seen me for my weirdness have decided that they're going to support me. (interview, 1/20/2020)

In white society such as their own school, in contrast to East Asian students, South Asian students were inclined to stick together as they were comfortable with each other, and such close companionship was critical for individual survival and psychological well-being. Beverly Tatum (1997) discusses how people of color are often isolated in inequitable social systems and how the opportunity to connect with peers within their ethnic/racial groups becomes important for psychological survival. Consistent with studies that show how positive experiences of acculturation emerge from attachment to ethnic identity, the Indian Asian youths were the most vocal and active students across those who were considered “model minorities.” Although Chinese American and Korean American students expressed how they constantly feel intimidated in white spaces, they coped by pursuing predominantly white groups or mixed-race groups to “blend in” rather than seeking “people who look like them for support” in school spaces. Such patterns were starkly distinct between East Asian and South Asian youths.

However, many East and South Asian youths found a sense of belonging outside of the formal school spaces and within their ethnic communities. Like what prior studies suggest, when Korean American students realized that they will never be recognized as “fully American,” they sought out individuals and groups that recognize and share their achieved identities (Palmer, 2007) in spaces that bypass white gaze. Tuan (1968) observed a close association between Asian Americans and co-ethnic individuals through a community of friends and gatherings. Given Teranishi's (2010) argument that children are embedded in a broader community with social networks that extend beyond their parents and family members, Asian American children are most likely to be brought up in their same ethnic community. Although the co-ethnic communities in this area are relatively small compared to the urban area suburbs, Indian American youths and their families’ close association with their ethnic affinity groups outside of school was no exception. Diya argued how anyone of Indian descent can be part of a tight Indian community.

So, in the area, Indians are like not common at all or rare enough that any Indian is basically your friend. Um, so that creates a really tight sense of community inside the Indian community here and we're friends with a lot ... there's just people that we've met through being Indian that we would've never met had we been a different ethnicity. And like some of our best friends that we have are just through being Indian. (interview, 2/19/2020)

Indian youths spoke about how they can build a deeper connection with those from the Indian subcontinent although they may come from varying parts of the country and speak a different dialect. He mentioned, “I think South Indian...they speak, they might speak a different language, but it's less of like a language connection and more of like a nationality connection, as in like, ‘Oh you guys came from India too’” (interview, 2/19/2020). Though there was competition in terms of educational performance among parents and children in a tight-knit Indian community, Sarah described the ethnic community her family was fully immersed in as a

strong “support system.” In her ethnic community, parents shared information and resources regarding their children’s education and advocated high standards expected to be met by the members of the group.

There's like definitely politics but in the end, we're all kind of just like a support system. Like we will help you. There are some aunties who are also like, ‘Am I doing better than her?’ You know, like the typical Indian thing...my mom like hates showing us off...you know, other Indian aunties are like, ‘(inaudible) got first’ and then they'll like... show off instead of being actually proud of their kid. They'll be happy that they get to show off, you know, like that. So, my mom doesn't want to do that. She's like, ‘I don't need to tell them everything. I'm happy if my kid is happy. I don't need to flex about it as long as I know,’ you know? (interview, 2/19/2020)

Prior studies have examined how ethnic and racial identities are constructed and reinforced through close-knit ethnic communities with strong educational networks, which mediate the sharing of information and resources. It is worth pointing out that the frame of exceptional success also comes from within the ethnic community. This was true among Chinese, Indian, and Korean American students and families. Chinese American students look up to co-ethnic immigrants—not native-born whites—as their models to emulate success (J. Lee & Zhou, 2015; Louie, 2004). Immigrant optimism and stories of their predecessors' success are widely shared within ethnic communities to receive family honor and influence Asian American students so that they consider schooling as a sole pathway to success (Louie, 2004). However, sharing stories of the academic success of children fosters a narrow framework of the concept of success in such communities. Teranishi (2010) asserts that Asian American youths are well aware of how these values are found in their communities. For example, the pressure to pursue college was an expectation that was placed upon youths at home and in the community. Scholars have noted how social capital manifests as cultural norms within co-ethnic communities (Kao, 2004). Additionally, membership in an ethnic group helped them acquire the relevant social capital to meet such expectations and achieve success.

A network of friends and relatives in the community was considered the most crucial source of information and guidance in pursuing college (Teranishi, 2010). Parents turned to their networks in communities instead of the available school resources for information and support essential to their college applications. Similarly, in Korean communities, Lew (2006) demonstrates how “students’ network revolved around obtaining information and learning skills related explicitly to achieving in school and advancing their economic status” (p. 96). Korean American prospective college students associated themselves with upperclassmen and peer mentors who provided guidance through the college admissions process. Parents and students not only gained knowledge about exams, applications, and career opportunities but also found private tutors and counselors through their peers in school, church, and community organizations (Lew, 2006). Moreover, parental involvement extended beyond the boundaries of the home and into their communities as well as parents, in conversations with their children, emphasize their need to associate with co-ethnics or other Asian American children in school in order to be academically driven.

Lastly, co-ethnic community spaces such as Protestant churches offered provided first- and second-generation Korean American students with exposure to cultural enrichment (Cho et al., 2003). For instance, religious affiliation offered Korean Americans “social belonging, recognition, emotional comfort, and recreation, and maintain a vital link to the old country via ethnic fellowship and solidarity” (Hurh & J. Kim, 1990, p. 32); this helped to sustain themselves in their experiences that were encompassed by “complex conditions of uprooting, existential marginality, and sociocultural adaptation for rerooting” (p. 31). Among the study participants, Amy discussed how she acquired more than moral and religious support—she saw her fellow churchgoers as extended or surrogate family members whom she could relate to and rely upon

(Cao, 2005). She also explained how she was fortunate to have a group of friends at a local ethnic church community who accept her as her true self. She frequently expressed how she relates to her friends at her local Korean church and feels more comfortable around them than she does at school.

I tried to be more accepted I guess 'cause I know [with] my youth group, even if I'm like really weird...they don't really care. [...] Some benefits I'd say is like, we're all Korean kids, you know, but...I don't even know how to explain it. I feel like when we're at church or when we're with each other, we're able to like relate to each other more. And because of them, I like church. They're all Korean and they all speak Korean, we all like eat Korean food and things like that. So, I think it's geared to like experience, like being with a community that's like you. (interview, 1/21/2020)

The church congregation provided a buffer against racial discrimination, distress from the acculturation process, and other influences that impede individuals in preserving their cultural values and identities (S. Kim et al., 2012). Additionally, Lew (2004) found that the reinforcement of ethnic ties and identities at churches helped insulate Korean American youths from racism and the lack of proper supports in schools and neighborhoods. Kang and Romo (2011) demonstrated a significant positive relationship between involvement in church settings, personal spirituality, positive mentoring relationships, and psychological and behavioral outcomes among adolescents. In the study, Korean American adolescents were given opportunities to develop supportive mentor relationships with adults—herein, the youths had access to previously established social networks of people from similar backgrounds. Such congregational support had a positive impact on the well-being of youths, which reduced high-risk behaviors and physical and mental health problems (S. Kim et al., 2012).

Conclusion

For most East and South Asian students, their relative racial privilege and middle-class advantage provided affordances to be indifferent towards the injustices against Black and Brown

students in school and society writ large. However, despite the role of the Asian students in preserving anti-Blackness within the school, they have always been victims of systemic racism themselves. The youths' experiences were shaped by the deep-seated anti-Asian racism in the U.S., which is exacerbated by the stereotypes of Asians as perpetual foreigners. They were still perceived as un-American and an inherent threat to whiteness and western ways of life. Being Asian was the antithesis of being American. The youths were impacted by the rise of nativist xenophobia, anti-Asian hate, and systemic violence ever since the COVID-19 outbreak. The research findings presented in this chapter made evident that anti-Asian racism has had negative impacts on Asian youths. However, according to the participants, oftentimes, discriminatory practices concerning anti-Asian sentiments were disregarded because the degree of hatred against Asians is not considered as severe as that of the violence against Blacks and/or other racialized minorities. The perceived relative privilege and honorary white status of Asian youths discounted the everyday experiences of the discrimination and racism they are subjected to.

Chapter Six: The Demand for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

This chapter starts with the general assessment of the study participants regarding the racial climate of the school and its approach to issues concerning race. Youths in this study collectively voiced their demand for critical constructive dialogues around race, wherein they were willing to participate as interlocutors and work towards community change to ensure equity across racial groups. As demonstrated in the previous chapters, Asian and Black youths both face racism and are minoritized by institutional racism that white kids do not have to deal with but the two groups experience racism differently. In the case of Asian Americans, pressures of meeting the academic and social expectations of the model minority stereotype are exacerbated by xenophobia and bigotry toward their communities. Thus, youth of color faced an urgent need for culturally responsive and trauma-informed education. This chapter is dedicated to uplifting the demanding voices of students and adults for healing on the individual and the community level.

Students' Perspectives on Redstone High School

After the lunch period was over, I followed Amar to her advisory. When we entered the classroom, Ms. Hallie Francis was sitting at her computer desk. On a typical day when I would visit the advisory, Ms. Francis would be seen sitting near the students in front of the room with her desktop, preparing for her upcoming classes after quickly taking attendance at the beginning. But that day, she had projected her screen up on the whiteboard. A google doc that read *School Creed Video Reflective Activity* was projected onto the screen. What we saw was the school creed with two words of the same initial letter on each row, lining up to form the name of the school mascot. As Amar and I sat down on an empty seat, she whispered to me that these values made the school “look nice to parents.” She dismissed these activities as customary school practices that drilled down school values into the students. Amar found the word ‘necessary’,

which started with the letter N in the acronym, particularly frivolous. “How do we make ourselves necessary?” she said, sneering.

Ms. Francis stood in the middle of the room, facing the whiteboard as she shared her thoughts sagaciously, “The creed pushes you to do well but not too overly competitive because you shouldn’t be mean.” She added that it also “pushes people to higher rigor but not to the point where it encourages one to comply to the status quo.” The teacher vaguely offered words of motivation, mentioning how the students could be “leaders of change.” Then suddenly, a white male student yelled out, “We are extremely white here at Redstone High. We’re the whitest school.” He turned to me as if he knew his statement would portend the prelude to a polemical debate, making his intentions known. People at Redstone High School often avoided talking about race, but most knew that one could not speak about the school without speaking about race. Amar’s friend, Mike, who was also a white male, also exhibited a puckish demeanor, wanting to see how the teacher would respond to the student who broke the sacred taboo that compelled students not to talk about race.

A different white male student in the room, who seemed busy on his phone, called out, “White people suck.” Things escalated quickly and someone else yelled out, “You are speaking in a position of privilege.” Another white male student, who was sitting right behind Amar jumped into the conversation, “If you talk about race, I’m going to slap you.” He was cold sober and furious, and I started to feel the pressure intensify. Someone else in the room uttered, “We are, as a whole school, assholes. That’s the fact.” I started losing track of who was saying what as many more students broke their silence. “Can we ask people to join my table? Our school is cliquey.” “I think it’s part of the high school experience.” Ms. Francis interrupted the chaos, “We

shouldn't hash things from the past, but we have to. We have a new principal, and we need to see everything from a new perspective."

Ms. Francis quickly glanced at me, broaching the very subject she was trying so hard to avoid, "We have work to do as a school, don't we?" Someone else shouted out, "There are good people, even though we're the racist school." A student of color in the room blurted out, "White people have said things to minorities that are so bad." One student brought up a particular incident where the seniors had cheered racist chants during the school football and basketball games. They mentioned a female staff who was there when it happened, at one of the football games. A student pointed out that she didn't expect the staff to do anything in that situation, "She's not going to stand up to the whole student body." The teacher asked, "If you're observing or hearing things, what do you do?" Someone in the room replied, "You can't stand up to the senior—that you can't do that chant. They're going to make fun of you." Then the teacher addressed the whole group, "Do you go to the staff?" "There was a staff there, but they didn't do anything." Another student said, "You put a target on yourself as soon as you speak up, you put yourself as a target." The teacher stated, "That's a school culture that needs to change." Mike evinced resentment toward the school community, but the adults in particular, "It's not you guys who are powerless but there's a limit to what you guys can do." Ms. Francis immediately replied, "There's a lot of layers to this."

The bell rang and Ms. Francis seemed relieved that her advisory period was over. She took a quick look at me and sternly asserted to her students, "The discussion stays here" before they left the room. Ms. Francis was caught off guard by the unexpected discussion regarding racism in the school. As I was leaving the room with Amar, she told me that she wanted to believe that the student who threatened others not to talk about race said it jokingly, but it still

hurt her feelings because it brought up memories that reminded her of hurtful things she had heard about immigrants and Muslims in the past at the school. When I met Mike later in the day, he told me how some students thought the school was progressive and more “open to stuff” than others; however, a large group of students, including himself, thought that the school was not inclusive enough and was not as “open as other schools.” (fieldnotes, 9/26/ 2019)

Students’ Demand for Change

The students of all races I had spoken with often expressed their disapproval regarding the lack of transparency on the school’s part in terms of addressing issues concerning racial discrimination and sexual assault, which cultivated a chronic and toxic school culture. Although Asian students were rather uninvolved and, on the sidelines, when it came to scandals and school-wide incidents, they condemned the school as an institution that is unwilling to take the proper steps to rectify injustices that impede a fair and just school culture. Students believed that the school made fewer efforts to take action, and in the offset that it did take a significant level of effort, the adults failed to listen and include the voices and concerns of the students in its process to tackle the issues that caused harm not only to the few concerned individuals but the entire student body. This is a sentiment shared by Farid, an Indian American male student regarding the lackluster attitudes of the school toward complaints and reports filed against pervasive sexual harassment/assault incidents.

Students have like specific demands like, ‘Hey, can you like listen to my story that I survived like sexual harassment or like sexual assault?’ And it's not, even Redstone High School, like back at like middle school, the same problem was like this one. There's the same problem with sexual harassment and assault. It's like the administrators will not listen. They refuse to listen to his survivor stories. They refuse to take action. It's like if the student [perpetrator] is an athlete, then remove athletic privileges instead of punishing them by like the school code. It's ridiculous... It's like the school doesn't care about their students and they don't. I guess administration doesn't have that much of a connection to their students ‘cause they don't spend like every school day with them.

One day, I drove up to the driveway of the school's main entrance and noticed that it was awfully desolate. The school was closed due to an online school threat that foretold a shooting during the students' walkout protest scheduled for the day. Allegedly, one of the victims of a sexual assault perpetrator had threatened the school that she would carry out a school shooting because the admins failed to respond against the offender in her best interests. Students believed this incident to be a predictable and anticipated outcome of the school's mismanagement of the scandal, the lack of proper communication, and the absence of transparency and accountability across the student body and community. Within months into the study, it was evident that students generally felt "disjuncture" rather than "congruence" (Rubin & Hayes, 2010) in terms of how their best interests were not being served, which consequently discouraged them from participating in civic learning experiences whereby they would develop civic efficacy, agency, and "identity" (Youniss et al., 1997). Sarah describes students' reactions and responses in forms of protest and threats that were bound to happen as the school administrators attempted to suppress wrongdoings, controversies, and scandals, instead only looking out for its own reputation and self-serving interests.

Sarah: So, I've never really focused on that until like this year where I've kind of been like, 'Shit, wow, people are kind of weird.' Like you just see things happening and then you're just like, 'Why is this school not addressing this?' So, I haven't really had time.

Joan: Like what?

Sarah: Oh, like the whole sexual assault thing, I felt like they handled it completely wrong. [...] I didn't even know about it until someone threatened to shoot the walkout for it.

Joan: Same here, I didn't know until I went to school and the school was closed.

Sarah: Yeah, yeah. So, it's just like they let... they stopped things, because they closed it, it just kept on getting bigger and bigger. Then it finally exploded and we kind of, we figured it all out. We're like, 'Whoa, shitty things are happening.' Like they've been trying to hide it to make our school seem like happy and stuff. Like if something happens, I would just tell my students about it. Act like straight out to their face and be like 'This happened, this is life, this is going to happen. How are you going to deal with this?' Like it's not for us to decide how people should react.

We tell them the news, see what happens. Like 'cause you hold it down, something bad will happen.

Even the teachers appeared to be unaware of the measures undertaken by the school in terms of responding to the harm done to students and preventing potential missteps from occurring. Most importantly, the students realized that the school was ineffective as a civic institution, flopping around to intervene and hold its stance regarding the current injustices. When it came to issues of racism as well, James, a Korean American sophomore was critical of the school's consistent dysfunctionality in its approaches to justly address the wrongdoings. The students saw the school leaders' failure to call for change after, for example, the segregation of its students by race in administering the STAR testing, as a "disjuncture" (Rubin & Hayes, 2010) that widened the chasm of mistrust and distrust between the school leaders and school community. James also mentioned how the school was incompetent in communicating with students and allowing their voices to be heard. The school once again failed to include its students in opportunities for civic engagement and help them make sense of the larger forces that continue to shape the inequalities they face as well as other social issues within their community.

I think a single teacher or like an individual like part of the administration can't really do anything. But if I was able to control all of teachers or all of administration, I think large part would be like more transparency. I feel like there isn't enough like dialogue between students and like the administrative staff on like what they're trying to do. Like as a result we can have like these huge like issues like the STAR testing thing that eventually like ... it harmed everyone. I think by increasing dialogue, I think one, it could help with students' mistrust and mutual mistrust between students and administrative staff. Two, I think it would stop a lot of... 'cause from my experience I feel like from what has happened [and] from what even my sister told me, there's like a lot of what a lot of bad things that administration does that they just ... instead of like facing their issues and becoming better from it, they attempt to sweep it from, like sweep it under the rug. So, I feel by increasing dialogue and increasing their connection with students, they can actually, they would be forced to actually like fix their issues within administration.

In the eyes of the students, Redstone High went beyond trying to retain its reputation as a well-rounded institution to actively dismiss and conceal any events or scandals that would tarnish its

name. The school was concerned about its reputation and that it went to great lengths to market itself as a “good” school. This is what Sarah had to say:

I don't know if it's different than other high schools, but for our high school they value more about reputation than what actually happens. They're like, ‘Oh, we can't let people know that this happened in our school.’ So, they just like try to shush—not shush us—but they're kind of like, ‘Oh it's not that bad. Don't, don't say that...’

Rather than its focus on combatting issues of inequalities through dialogue and civic action, the school's ineffectiveness in addressing prejudice and discrimination against students of color played an important role in emboldening white privilege and fragility. Zee mentioned how, as a student of color, she viewed the school's passivity in its willingness to challenge white normativity as its disposition to maintain the status quo.

It might be a sensitive topic and Redstone is majority white. They might not be able to connect to the ideas of that. There's such a small minority of students that can say they're a minority, that I think the administration worries about potentially offending the white students being implicating them in a crime, that they're not guilty of like saying like, ‘Because you're white, you're racist or something like that.’

In response to the STAR testing scandal, among the other incidents of racial injustices prevalent in the school, Sarah suggested that the school should not pick its battles based on the race of the perpetrators but solely on their offenses. Again, students viewed the school as a partial civic institution with a defective and impaired moral compass.

Um, I'd probably say just like hold—like I personally hold a blank slate. I wouldn't excuse people just based off race. I'd look at what happened. Like I wouldn't look at their name or like their race. I'd see what they did. What's the reasonable punishment for that? I wouldn't be like, ‘Oh, because they're this ethnicity, let them off.’[...] Like don't look at things associated with them. Look at what happened.

Need for Constructive Race Talk

Although EA and SA youth participants believed that schoolteachers are fully competent in initiating and leading critical dialogues with their students, the young people did not recollect any previous learning moment(s) where they were encouraged to openly talk about race and/or

take part in critical discussions of contested societal narratives within their formal school spaces (Hess, 2004; Zimmerman & Robertson, 2017). In this context, Sunny echoed a shared longing for opportunities where students could come together to discuss race and racism as she believes “society can progress” (interview, 3/12/2020) when it starts to establish an individual and collective sense of political-moral awareness that is paramount for the dismantling of racism. Students saw constructive yet inclusive conversations as democratic vehicles for social change. This is what Sunny shared, “I like having it be more diverse. I think it's important to have diversity. You can see other people's opinions and I think that's the way how society can progress, like having different views, opinions” (interview, 3/12/2020).

Christine spoke of the importance of appropriate guidance and intervention on behalf of adults who fostered youths to seriously consider the implications attached to racial stereotyping. According to Christine, teachers of color were more devoted than white teachers regarding discussions on race, challenging stereotypes, and racism in classrooms. As the schools represented a small percentage of teachers (less than 10 out of 148 full-time equivalent teachers as of 2022) who are from minoritized backgrounds, she believed that race rarely came up as a topic of discussion within spaces of learning.

I don't feel like I'm really at a disadvantage because like no one's really born smart and know-it-all, they learn through mistakes and experiences. I guess like stereotypes in general, the group of people that it's saying is bad, it's like not good. And like in Mandarin, when the teacher, at the beginning of the year, we had like a serious talk about stereotyping and then we went through all the stereotypes that Asians are aimed at. And then we were [...] trying to like debunk them to make sure to prove that they weren't true. And [...] she like took it very seriously and then also in all her classes they were taking it very seriously. And it wasn't something to joke about, it's like very serious ‘cause like they want you to feel safe and in the school community and so, and they don't want you to feel threatened.

James also made a very insightful discovery from the observations across his honor and AP classes. He found that advanced classes, which are primarily occupied by white and Asian

students and heavily invested in achieving advanced class credits for future upward mobility were where race was least talked about. It is worth mentioning that he had deeply analyzed precisely who benefits from these AP classes and how the lack of conversations around race and racial inequity in these high-tracked classes shape the viewpoints and educational experiences of students. Race was rarely talked in high-tracked classes that comprised of students who most likely carried greater level of soft power.

- Joan: Um, how often do teachers bring up race or race-related topics in classes?
- James: Um, very rarely, I think. I think that's something that a lot of class—besides for like my USGP class—I don't think I've really received a lot of race based like talks or discussions. Um, I think for me the funniest part is that like a lot of things especially like a lot of higher-level education for example, things like AP classes which require you to put money into them to take the AP exam, they tend to focus on race the least. Which I thought it was kinda funny 'cause like, yeah, like there's so a focus on benefiting people who are rich. So that means like stereotypic or like predominantly white and Asian students. They're [classes] most likely spearheaded by like a white or Asian teacher.

He continued to mention the value of talking about race even if he believed the Redstone community, especially the white student body was somewhat detached and therefore not deeply devoted to the issues of race.

- Joan: Do you think there's a necessity to talk about race in our classrooms, especially in Redstone?
- James: I think so. I feel like that's... actually I'm not sure because so many people in Redstone are white. I feel like not a lot of people would really care about that kind of stuff, but... I feel it's important to at least talk about it.
- Joan: Do you think there is an importance of educating white students about racial issues?
- James: I think, the thing is, I think that it would be important but like especially in Redstone, I don't think there would be a really effective way of doing that. I think there have been attempts by Redstone to try to incorporate that kind of stuff, but every time at least for me, even I come out of that thinking, 'What have I just witnessed?' Like they're not effective at all, I think. And everyone forgets it immediately.

Nevertheless, Redstone High was not completely unreceptive and inert regarding the need for greater diversity and inclusion (e.g., attempting to recruit faculty of color and providing

bilingual STEAM classes). Yet, in the eyes of James and the others, the school was failing in its attempts to incorporate anti-racist initiatives and foster high morals across its community. James recalled attending “equity camp,” which was a mandatory event for freshmen before school started in the fall. To him, the conversations that dominated the program were not as meaningful as he hoped they would be—rather, they were “surface-level” discussions that, more often than not, ended up framing whites as racists and “bad” by default, consequently exacerbating racial divisiveness across the study body even further (interview, 1/21/2020).

For example, um, in eighth grade I went to this thing that was hosted by Redstone. So, I was like, it was in the summer... so I was going to become freshmen. They did this thing in the summer is like this equity camp thing for five days... And then what happened was these teachers were talking about...it was like they didn't, I didn't really learn anything that I already hadn't learned about. It was basically just surface-level things are racism exists and white people are bad. I'm pretty sure that like one Black staff person was only there to provide legitimacy 'cause just having a bunch of white people, white teachers talking about equity doesn't sound exactly the best.

James suggested that the school should invite deeper dialogues between white students and students of color as extant discussions on race initiated by teachers who are more aware of the realities of inequities faced by people of color. The current methods of communicating about race and racism were limiting in that they only allowed students to receive one-dimensional and superficial information. James envisioned such dialogues as connecting to the real lives of the students of Redstone High by unveiling reality, critiquing the racial hierarchy and status quo, and taking action towards systemic transformation.

I think something that we could really do is encourage more dialogue between white students and minority students. 'Cause I feel like the way that they're doing it right now is, it's a lecture from mostly white teachers. Like Redstone has not hired any nonwhite teachers or I think they have not hired any Black teachers, I think. Um, it's mostly just white teachers giving you a lecture about these kinds of stuff and like 'Wonder, it's like really boring.' Two, um, like most people don't really get anything out because these aren't personal stories and they don't really get a chance like, question anything. So, I [would] think a lot by having these kinds of conversations between whites and minority students, a lot could be done since now white people have a chance to like ... not only

question the status quo but they can also question what's like, the viewpoints of minority students. By doing so, they can have an active learning experience about the issues that minorities face.

Lilian also spoke critically regarding discussions on race within the classroom. Students described the pedagogical practices concerned with race to be directly mirroring the banking concept of education (Freire, 1972) which retains students as “an empty ‘mind’ passively open to the reception of deposits of reality from the world outside” (p. 75) and impedes them from becoming a conscious being. In contrast, students possess an innate critical awareness and reception whereby they named what they were experiencing within the classroom walls even without the conceptual tools given to them.

...Sometimes they're also teaching us like how to think and in a way that is like, just listen to what the teacher says. Because a lot of classes set up in a way that like, we don't really analyze anything. We just listen to what the teacher says and that's rewarded. So, I think there's conflicting things when they're telling us to think critically, but then they like make us not think critically. And then what they day teach, um, there is definitely like a slant on everything, like in history books, the winners write the history books, which is cliché, but true and they treat U.S. history as the winners.

Again, students argued that teachers did not bring up topics concerning race enough in the classrooms. Youths specifically felt that white teachers appeared to be relatively more reluctant about speaking on race and racism, in comparison to the very small number of teachers of color who were at least willing to try. Students were able to sense the fear of the well-intended white teachers regarding discussions on race to avoid the risk of initiating potential confrontations and oppositions followed by such attempts (Pollock, 2004a). This is what Sophia argued,

Well, I feel like the teachers here at least are avoiding talking about race. They just don't talk about it, they don't wanna make any problem from there. Yeah, I think they should talk more about these things because if you don't talk about it, it's gonna be the same all the time, forever. I think there should be more open environment for people to talk about those sensitive topics and school should be the one who creates the vibe and more open,

active environment. Yeah, they need to educate people, first... Yeah, they just need to talk more about... like not being a racist...

One day, Mr. Charlie Harvey, the Director of Equity and Student Achievement from the school district arrived at the school to speak to the freshmen class about the “power of words” and why they should refrain from using the N-word against Black students and among each other. After giving a lecture on the history of slavery, the contributions of African Americans, and the origin of the racial epithet, the director from the school district challenged his audience to become “young leaders of change at Redstone High.” He mentioned how the students would already know by now that their school is branded as the “white, rich, and racist” school in the greater area and that they should be the ones to break it away from such stereotypes (field notes, 11/18/2019). The next day, the English teacher, Ms. Ellie Wilson, approached me and asked what I thought about Mr. Harvey’s presentation. I shared with her my thoughts and asked her why she wanted to know my perspective. She carefully spoke of how the English teachers came together to discuss their concerns about how the freshmen class “weren’t emotionally ready” for certain information presented to them. I was rather stunned by her statement as I had deemed Mr. Harvey’s talk as appropriate and necessary, one that prompted everyone in the school—not just the freshmen class—to discuss such issues. I assured Ms. Wilson that the talk was not “too much” for the freshmen class to handle and that the images shown in the presentation were certainly not “too graphic for students,” echoing the terms she used to give emphasis. I also mentioned how the emotions that rose to the surface from the talk were “productive discomforts” (McAvoy et al., 2022) that are natural and necessary when talking about race. I continued, “It’s the history of real people and for some Americans, they are still going through it or reliving their history every single day.” Ms. Wilson told me that she agreed with me and that what she wanted was affirmation and someone to understand her outlook, which she knew was different from

those of her colleagues. After our conversation, I thought to myself, “How could Black history, which is very much American history, be too much to handle for the rest of America?”

(fieldnotes, 11/19/2019)

Instantly becoming the talk of the town, Mr. Harvey’s lecture on the history of slavery and the N-word made white teachers uneasy about the discomfort experienced by their white students, and by the idea that their “innocence” and “naiveté” were challenged. Race talk hurled inconvenient truths that challenged white people to preserve their white racial innocence. Such common narratives have been utilized as political tactics to guarantee the avoidance of discomfort in discussions on race and racism (Pollock, 2004a; Sue, 2005) in order to safeguard the “delicacy” of white feelings and fragility (DiAngelo, 2018). Just as several states have gone to the extent of enacting laws that prohibit “divisive” discussions around racism and/or sexism (Schwartz, 2021), which may cause students to identify with either the “racists” or the oppressed (Sue, 2013), well-meaning white teachers at Redstone High attempted to avoid difficult dialogues around race. As such, training teachers to respond to discomforts concerning controversial content appears to be the first step toward developing sociopolitical awareness, racial literacy, and civic reasoning based on democratic deliberation in classrooms. Teachers should not only be able to participate in productive discussions on issues of injustice themselves but also share authority in the space wherein the discussion takes place (Conklin et al., 2021); further, they must build a politically trusting relationship to warrant the level of vulnerability necessary for fostering informed citizenry that is attentive to injustices (McAvoy et al., 2022).

Clara, among others, weighed in on the value of fostering honest conversations concerning race to further inclusivity and empathy. She added that the school’s current efforts in

fostering such dialogue should involve and center on the lived experiences of people who are (in)directly affected by racism.

Clara: I feel like if they talk about—well they kind of do—but maybe talk more about racism and yeah, I guess like race and stuff. I feel like people would feel more sympathy and be more inclusive or try to...

Joan: In the classroom? Or where would it take place? The conversations?

Clara: Um, probably like in the classroom. So, it's like a smaller audience and then maybe people can have discussions and if people could, if people who were really actually affected by racism, they could come to speak or something, that'd be cool.

Pradeep called for more efforts similar to the brainstorming in the school community, which also had a say in the town hall meeting following the notorious STAR testing incident. Students understood the underlying reasons for which Redstone High was bound to run into incidents such as this, due to such an initiative.

I think there was a town hall meeting on the incident happened for the STAR testing and some of the students were like, they wanted to create a class. I forgot really what it was. It was like a yearlong class where we talked about cultures of different people and their past and what they have to go through. I thought that was a really good idea... I mean I don't think that should have ever happened. I don't feel like the need to go out and collect all the people of color and say like, 'You should be doing better and stuff.' I don't feel like they needed to do that. I feel like if you just had a better curriculum and stuff, then we don't have to need, you wouldn't need to have to do all this.

First and foremost, according to Pradeep, the school was less “welcoming” and “accepting” (interview, 11/27/2019) of its students from non-dominant communities and therefore, he would make inclusivity and acceptance of everyone a priority if he was to be a school leader.

I'd probably be if I was a good administrator, I would make school more accepting of everyone. 'Cause right now there's not much culture reflected on the school. But what if you were to go to like Plainville High School, I think it's like all like bunch of paintings and stuff that reflect the students on the walls everywhere. But then whenever we go to Redstone, there's not much going on. I'll probably change that.

However, it is important to note here that Asian youths in this study were relatively privileged in terms of social class and they felt they were entitled to greater inclusion and recognition.

Students within the Asian American group varied in their commitment in addressing racial inequities. While Asian youths in general collectively voiced their demands for critical constructive dialogues around race to address the real problems they face, some were not necessarily interested in combating all forms of racism.

The Demand for Counseling and Trauma-Informed Education

Throughout my time at Redstone High, I observed how the school disregarded the wide range of institutional challenges and social issues that may tarnish the reputation that it callously endeavored to uphold. Additionally, students perceived faculty to bear indifferent attitudes toward racial discrimination, often even taking the matter lightly. In response to the perceived school's inability and incompetency, the school insiders, which included school staff, paraprofessionals, tutors, campus support, and students themselves, demanded their leaders provide students with trauma-informed education (Craig, 2016; SAMHSA, 2014) which are often reviewed as building knowledge around trauma and building emotionally positive school culture (Thomas et al., 2019; Venet, 2021). In recent years, trauma-informed education has gained national momentum to counteract the traumas produced by schooling that subjugates minoritized youths and communities—and Redstone High had jumped on the bandwagon as well. Though the school was perceived as less trauma-sensitive, some of the school staff had worked closely with students in greater need of academic and socioemotional support.

Previously, schools have employed social and emotional learning (SEL), character-based and behavioral modification programs, and Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) among others to address students' behaviors that were seen as needing adjustments. Although there is heightened awareness regarding the need to shift the focus on students' traumatic history that has been passed across generations and interventions such as trauma-informed education, I

posit that without sufficient attention to how these traumas are historically compounded, the “trauma-informed” approaches may once more be contained as “individualized, biomedical understandings of trauma” (Petrone & Stanton, 2021, p. 537). Ahistorical objectives of interventions without intense commitment to dismantling inequitable systems are neither based on anti-oppressive nor counter-hegemonic (Camangian & Cariaga, 2021) approaches. My study finding suggests a direction aimed at serving students who have been historically marginalized by understanding their intersections of oppression and marginality in more race-conscious (Alvarez, 2020) and sociohistorical perspectives through a trauma-reducing (Petrone & Stanton, 2021) and humanizing pedagogical framework (Bartolomé, 1994; Salazar, 2013). For example, Mr. David Levy asserted that the school fails to address the contexts of historical and ongoing racial trauma that accumulate through racially charged episodes on social media and day-to-day interactions with existing inequities in social institutions.

Both because they are increasingly knowledgeable about history in the past but also because their social media world, landscape. They're immediately in it and I don't think that we've done a good job of helping students cope with that secondary trauma that they get through social media and so... um, to borrow a phrase from my mentor, when you're in this... in an uncontrolled emotional state of a pain of being traumatized and you're... you're not helped, you are radioactive, and so it's a visualization of... of this hurt and the... the kids um, reach almost like a critical mass of hurt where they are this... this pain is radiating out from them into the others and reciprocating. And that can lead them to make choices in the moment that don't help them strategically and it also colors the view of external adults—adults outside that don't know their context—see them either blowing off steam by being a little bit too rowdy and joking around being too loud. Another thing that pains me more and more is the idea of being too loud. Um, It's entirely contextual to social upbringing, to your culture you know—I've tried to communicate that with other adults... some get it, some don't.

He also believed that, largely, the school administrators lacked the sensitivity and proclivity to pay attention to students' experiences of trauma—whether they are psychological, sexual, racial, etc. He recalled witnessing an incident that produced and reinforced trauma where students galvanized a walkout protest against sexual assault.

I remember also like the... so many other things related to that sexual... there was a sexual harassment walk-out and so the kids got their parents to called them off for the block and then the parents... they were forced to either stay outside the building in the 20-degree weather or they can come back in and go... go to classes as if nothing happened. 'Okay, there's a part of me that agrees. Okay, you could go back to class if you're that.' But then there's a part of me that recognizes, 'If you're shaken, if you're a victim you need a debrief.' I don't think that they realize that... and I've been to like personal growth workshops or like other things that involves a brief, an execution, and a debrief. I mentioned that to an administrator who was like deer in the headlights... like "They needed a debrief?" I was like, "Yeah," and he was like... because the conversation flowed such as: "You know I didn't like the way that they were answering." "Well then what are we supposed to do?" "They're supposed to... they're called out, they have to stay outside the building, or they have to go to class." And I was like "Well they needed a debrief." And he goes "What?" And I was like "Yeah. That's a trauma. The counselors or something should take them into a room and debriefed them before they go back into school." And the associate principal was... was seemed very... seemed dumbfounded without words.

On a different note, Mr. Levy disclosed to me how his students have expressed the need for transparency in administrative response and investigation of racial and sexual violence reports, in addition to increasing the number of counselors available in the building. He said,

And you know how you brought up that students were being sent to the counselor more this year? Even so students have been telling me that there should be more counselors in the school building. Yeah, [...] there were times when kids said that next time, they could get an appointment with a counselor would be like a week down the road or more...

Mr. Levy's colleague, Mrs. Sua Chue, who is the tutor coordinator, discussed a need for students who are "struggling" in terms of their academic performance. She expressed that the school should invest in securing more counselors for those who are often overlooked. She told me that she would intuitively transition into the role of a counselor during her tutoring sessions as she often observed her students coming in with "extra trauma, extra anxiety, and extra stress" (interview, 1/15/2020).

They come in and they're like, 'Mrs. Sua, I just took my English test and I feel like I bombed it, I worked so hard on it, and I don't know how to talk to my teacher.' I was like, 'Okay, so I understand. Let's go talk to her together.' So, I will initiate those conversations and I will eventually bring the students and the teacher can talk and I will be like, 'Okay, so do you understand how we're going to move forward on this. Should

we work on some other plan?’ Part of my job is student advocate, so I do a lot of... ‘I know you’re failing math, have you talked to your teacher’ if the answer is no, then let’s go talk to your teacher and figure things out. Maybe your teacher doesn’t know that you’re struggling in this area ‘cause they do have 50 other students that they oversee. Sometimes you just go under the radar, it’s not that they don’t like you but because they have so many other students to worry, they just might have forgotten and that’s it. So, (there is a need for) therapy or like maybe just a room for student to go in to relax for like 15 minutes and return back to class and be reengaged.

When asked what she would do differently to address the trauma experienced by students of color within campus spaces as well as the trauma produced and reinforced therein, Mrs. Chue said:

If I was an administrator, I would maybe settle...many of our students, they have math anxiety, they have homework or test anxiety. Maybe settle a therapy session for students to be like, ‘I’m stressing over English project, I am terrified of doing my speeches or I’m terrified of presenting this ‘cause I don’t know’ kind of thing. Having those sessions because majority...I was talking to Shong Chou, and we realized that we need...we do a lot more counseling and therapy session than we do teaching... So, we here like giving them ideas, giving them talk throughs or walking them through their problems. And we’re like, we do a lot of therapy and counseling.

Ms. Lindsey Robinson, a paraprofessional who works with students with disabilities on a daily basis, displayed her concerns for students who need trusting adults and counselors to help them work through various strands of trauma in their lives.

I empathize with them and somethings I have an alcoholic parent so I can relate to them, and we can talk about it. My dad’s also been to jail so we can... some things we have in common with them that I feel like they trust me more ‘cause I can relate to them on some stuff. And also, stuff that needed to be reported go to the social worker and they get that kind of support too and report things that need to be reported, get them counseling. We also have outside workers who come in and do counseling and stuff...but I think there’s a lot of other students that aren’t para supported that also has like a lot of trauma in their lives, and I don’t think they’re getting enough support ‘cause they don’t have paras or someone that can advocate for them and if they don’t have someone that they can build a relationship with and feel comfortable telling that to them...teachers might know about it but there’s not a lot that we can do, I guess. I don’t know if they’re getting counseling and stuff like that so...

Trauma-informed education and counseling should not only benefit a select few. Farid, in agreement with many East and South Asian American youths who are often perceived as not

having “issues” (interview, 1/14/2020) due to their ascribed model minority identity, articulates the value of having a strong support system in place. Several youth participants in the study had experiences of reaching out for counseling sessions, only to have doors slammed in their faces due to a lack of attention and limited availability of counselors and therapists who could attend to their unique needs.

Mental health support for students is definitely a big one. Like we have one school psychologist, and that person isn't always in. She like went to see like the school psychologist and tried to like set up an appointment ... try to set up an appointment and the person, at the front desk that she went to was like, ‘Oh, she's not in right now.’ So, like if we can spend all of this money on our sports teams and like funding an entire new big ass wing of our school, I think we can afford like a second school psychologist.

The experiences of school staff who work closely with historically marginalized youths informed their understandings of the urgent need for trauma-informed approaches to intervene in trauma-producing practices that inflict harm on students. Trauma-reducing education is more expansive than simply one that encompasses just counseling and therapy sessions. As the data suggests, the study informants largely sought out “trauma-reducing” education, which starts by challenging commonsensical understandings of trauma, transforming trauma-producing practices and teachings, and employing “relational, participatory, and humanizing methodologies” (Petrone & Stanton, 2021, p. 537) that locate the systemic and institutional elements inflicting harm and trauma on the students.

Conclusion

Students demanded specific changes at Redstone High. One of the two central ideas shared across the student body and a faction of faculty and staff was the need to talk about race and racism in a way that leads to more equitable outcomes for those who have been historically marginalized within the school community and society at large. Another strand of change that

the participants demanded was the need for more robust support and education systems that are more conscious of racial and social traumas experienced through schooling.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

This ethnography brings forth a new terrain in the discussions around the schooling experiences of East and South Asian-American youth in white suburbia. First, one of the greatest contributions is the introduction of South Asian boys' practice of finessing to negotiate both academic and social aspects of their ascribed model minority identities. They used finessing to negotiate racialized stereotypes to achieve academic success as well as resist the nerd stereotype to escalate their social positionings as racial minorities. Their views on schooling and approaches to model minority stereotypes were based on their awareness of perceived foreignness and comparative valorization compared to other minority groups (C. J. Kim, 1999). Despite their identities as racial minorities, the Asian youths' access to perceived racial privilege intersected with class-based privilege, which led the youths to be entitled to recognition for themselves only, though not necessarily interested in addressing all forms of racism. In the case of Indian American boys, their behaviors indicated their consent to hegemony which ultimately preserved the neoliberal model minority logic.

AsianCrit provided a lens through which this ethnographic study explored the intersections of race, class, and gender that led to the youths' negotiation of being subjugated as minorities who are accepted conditionally and simultaneously as both honorary white and designated foreigners who are perpetually un-American. Despite how the youths are understood and treated as exemplary among minorities, Asian youths in the study have continued to experience and get hurt by experiencing racism in the forms of racial slurs, deprecatory insults, messages of partiality from their peers and teachers, marginalization, and isolation. Anti-Asian hate and racism were often disregarded by the school as the perceived relative privilege and status of those in the Asian communities discounted the youths' everyday experiences of racism

and discrimination. As such, AsianCrit became appropriate to discern and underscore the harmful contradictions that the Asian youths continued to unravel as they navigate through schooling. Additionally, as AsianCrit suggests, the Asian youths in this study too were more than passive victims of racism. They collectively voiced their demands for critical constructive dialogues around race to address the real problems they face and culturally responsive and trauma-informed education for healing as individuals and as a community.

The first chapter introduced the overall outline of the dissertation and argued for its rationale. It presented previous literature on Asian American history and experience—specifically on how the model minority and perpetual foreigner stereotypes continue to shape the racialization of East and South Asian Americans in the U.S. This chapter was also dedicated to introducing and explaining Asian American Critical Race Theory (AsianCrit), which was the guiding theoretical framework employed to address the research questions and connect existing literature to the findings revealed in the study.

Chapter two discussed the methodology and research context that grounded the dissertation. It revealed the choice of methodological tools and justified their use in process of data collection and analysis. This chapter also allowed me to reflect on my positionality as the researcher is often considered the primary research tool in critical ethnographies.

Chapter three was dedicated to introducing how students' race played a significant role in shaping youths, particularly the schooling experiences of the youths of color at Redstone High School. This chapter highlighted how minoritized students wrestled with disproportionate forms of disciplinary policies and practices. To situate East and South Asian youths in the school, the pathologization, criminalization, segregation, and push-out of Black and Brown students were discussed. Additionally, chapter three examined the segregation of Black and Brown students

from white and Asian students with the adoption of surveillance and tracking. As such, East and South Asian American students were shielded from anti-Blackness and afforded their “Asian privilege,” thereby leading to negligence toward various issues pertaining to race and racism.

Chapter four presented how students made sense of and negotiated the model minority stereotype in four distinctive ways. Students were classified into four groups that corresponded with these approaches. Although the students from the first group did not actively challenge the authorities and systematic inequities, they were well aware of the social realities that bound them. Students from the second group voluntarily tried to remain informed of the conditions that sustain the inequalities and learned to think critically to discern the tensions and contradictions identified within school spaces. This group acted consciously by rejecting or resisting the identities ascribed to them. Although the third group was apprehensive of the racial hierarchy, they were receptive to the dominant discourse by being compliant as a protective response. Lastly, the fourth group exercised their agency to simultaneously leverage and challenge the ideological construction of their ascribed model minority identity by taking advantage of its yielded relative privilege to achieve academic success. Although they complied to perform the model minority identity, they simultaneously rejected the ascribed identity that positioned them as lower status by “finessing” through the school system.

Chapter five was dedicated to unearthing how cultural invalidation and the disparaging portrayal of historically marginalized Asian youths contribute to a sense of social isolation and psychological distress (Sue et al., 2009). The discourses and practices commonly observed in school spaces have entrapped East and South Asian communities into flat portrayal as second-class citizens. Students encountered racial/ethnic stratification, which was replete with subtle forms of pathologized discourses concerning Asians. The chapter was also written with the intent

to debunk mainstream understanding, which implies that Asians have standing equal to that of the whites. Although Asians enjoy privilege relative to the whites to a certain extent, their experiences demonstrate how they continue to face ostracization and marginalization, attesting to the idea that Asians are “othered”—those whose identities are the antithesis of being American.

Chapter six demonstrates how the study illustrates day-to-day resistance against institutional practices that constrain the life trajectories of students from non-dominant communities can be leveraged to encourage critical dialogue and qualitative transformation at Redstone High. This chapter captured the voices of students who demand expansive forms of diversity, inclusivity, equity, and social justice. Specifically, this chapter focused on students’ demand for constructive talk around race and trauma-informed social justice education after the preceding chapters presented the complex and nuanced experiences of students of color, particularly East and South Asian American youths.

Future Implications

This ethnographic research was not designed to offer specific implications for policy and practice, but my data do offer reflections on what not to do. One of the policy implications of the study is around racialized disciplinary and tracking policies which not only limited opportunities for Black, Brown, and Southeast Asian youths but also taught all members of the Redstone High School community about race (Tyson, 2011). These practices also played an active role in maintaining racial segregation and hierarchy through differential spaces of learning. Thus, my research study offers school administrators and practitioners to revisit the consequences of tracking practices that influence the construction of race and the educational experiences and outcomes of all its students.

Based on the findings, the study also offers several practical future implications for educational leaders committed to serving students of color. In this study, students voiced their concerns against the school administrators who were perceived as unresponsive and uninvolved, urging them to act in case of issues that negatively impact marginalized students. Further, students argued the school, as a collective, should challenge its own interests as well as the beliefs and practices it takes for granted. Creating a learning space for equity-oriented learning ecology necessitates ontological, epistemological, and axiological shifts in habitual ways of everyday institutional, pedagogical, and interactional practices. The urgent need for action and transformation in oppressive institutional systems that lead to the estrangement of students from socially marginalized communities is highlighted to a great extent in this study. Learning ecologies must be culturally affirming spaces where the diversities and complexities of students are valued in efforts to ensure educational equity for *all* students.

The first step toward building a culturally responsive and sustaining school culture is in the collective practices that aim to “perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling” (Paris, 2012, p. 95). Schools should provide extended forms of critical multicultural education geared toward social justice that extend beyond the disparate representational multicultural elements (e.g., cultural celebration; Banks, 2007). There is an ostensible need for culturally responsive and sustaining asset-based pedagogies that center on the cultural values and knowledge of communities of color. Studies have demonstrated syncretic and hybrid practices that enhance and promote the academic achievement and cultural competence of students by leveraging multiple and dynamic forms of the cultural capitals of communities (e.g., social networks, educational aspirations, resilience to navigate institutional racism; Yosso, 2005), funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 2013),

third space (Gutiérrez, 2008; Soja, 1996), and desire-based learning (Tuck, 2009), among others. Rather than “subtracting” schooling (Valenzuela, 1999), where students are stripped away of their innate potentials based on pervasive deficit ideologies, schools should open up structured opportunities to promote academic rigor, multicultural sensibilities, and critical learner identities. As suggested in this research, students were abundantly aware of the social realities that bound them, and they are competent to think critically and discern the tensions and contradictions identified across their social worlds. Students’ who are already practicing everyday resistance against inequities should be encouraged to learn their roles in furthering community change and equity. To foster youths’ prospects as leaders of change, schools should first be transformed into a learning space that is truly culturally revitalizing toward greater equity and social justice.

The current study highlights the need for robust support mechanisms that are responsive to the sociocultural needs of students and families of non-dominant backgrounds. Equity-oriented learning spaces wherein academic, emotional, and cultural needs of the youth of color are met are imperative to the pursuit of social justice education. As this study suggested, combined with the need to live up to the model minority stereotype, the psychological injuries from multiple forms of anti-Asian racism and discrimination can be significant contributors that heighten the psychological burdens faced by Asian American students. Scholars have argued that the utilization of culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogies (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Sleeter, 2012), through expansive and transgressive forms of learning within the school community, is essential to improving academic, social, and emotional outcomes of students who are not necessarily molded by and for the dominant culture. Disrupting racial/ethnic discourses and systematic social injustices also includes the work of supporting students to adopt transforming and reflexive social agency that are capable of assessing dominant practices as well

as internalized oppression. Inherent in this line of approaches is an intense commitment to a spirit of authentic trust and care (Valenzuela, 1999) which manifests through building meaningful relationships with youths to reverse and divert the historically accumulated harms done to them and their communities.

The journey toward building equitable and just forms of education entails undertaking active roles in intervening against all intersecting forms of oppression by establishing transparency and relationships of trust with the diverse communities the youths are immersed in. Reimagining equity in the field of education can begin by ensuring “community accountability,” (T. S. Lee & McCarty, 2017) wherein students and intergenerational communities are held accountable as collaborators in shaping learning environments conducive for nondominant students. School personnel and teachers should further explore how they can incorporate students, parents, and community members as partners to collectively strategize in disrupting monopolizing forms of pedagogy and prompting contextualized and situated approaches alongside long-term changes. In this effort, schools must also understand the actions that are critical to perpetuate and sustain the transformative aspects of reconstructing institutional practices and policies constraining the life trajectories of students from non-dominant communities. Additionally, developing mutual reciprocity among various actors within these community partnerships is central to the arduous undertaking of accepting change and promoting new transformation.

Future Research

As suggested by the participants in my study, the need for action and transformation in oppressive institutional systems that lead to the marginalization of students from nondominant communities is urgent, now more than ever. My research findings also highlight the importance

of establishing a culturally revitalizing and equity-oriented learning ecology wherein qualitative shifts in habitual means of everyday normative practices are established. A step toward creating radical opportunities in disrupting pervasive everyday pedagogical practices in school spaces could perhaps start from small projects in various forms of youth participatory action research (YPAR), where students of color critically explore the issues and structural inequities that they encounter as privilege or repression to develop the knowledge required to counter and challenge similar injustices (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Morrell, 2006; Stoudt et al., 2012). YPAR may allow youths of color to remain critical of the social realities shaped by the complexities accompanied by their racial identities and positionalities (Fine et al., 2021) and to (re)imagine their educational aspirations and future by taking on youth leadership roles to shape the making of educational policies and practices (Bertrand, 2018; Cammarota & Romero, 2011; Fox et al., 2010).

Collective action research, which is versatile and robust, demonstrates its potential as a tool for educators to utilize in opportunities such as professional development and school-wide initiatives. In addition, participatory action research (PAR) can translate into catalytic learning activities that promote critical identities and agencies of educators and school leaders to proactively work toward concrete solutions for community change and equity (Cohen et al., 2020; González & Hong, forthcoming). Transgressive forms of learning activity can be a critical tool for educational practitioners who can make real changes in terms of racial equity, promote cultural competency within the youths, and interfere with the epistemological, psychological, emotional, and symbolic injustices inflicted by various systems of oppression. Such efforts would involve the expansion of their activity systems and transformative agency, orienting them to a novel conceptualization of discourses and the use of specific tools to enable them to reflect

on their everyday practices (e.g., teaching pedagogy and philosophy). Although the positive impacts of participatory action research are evident, characterizing the potential to nourish youths and propel school authorities to undertake the pivotal role of disrupting pervasive everyday pedagogical practices in school spaces and beyond the classroom walls (Bertrand, 2018, 2019; Lac, 2019). It is not enough to merely dismantle the long-standing and deeply entrenched inequities that disproportionately harm Asian, Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and Pacific Islander youths and communities. PAR cannot be considered a silver bullet to oppressive policies and practices compounded by several years of propagated systemic racism.

YPAR is a strand of future research intended for educational researchers and practitioners who are attentive to the cultivation of equitable learning environments for diverse students of color, who are immersed in marginalizing discursive schooling practices. For example, a potential YPAR research with EA and SA youths might entail exploring issues that affect them in their day-to-day lives and helping them to make sense of the complex means by which they adopt opposing identities (Torre, 2009) and become both victims of racism (e.g., perception as a perpetual foreigner) and perpetrators of anti-Blackness (e.g., internalization of the model minority stereotype). Future research could also reveal how YPAR could be adopted as a counterstory methodology, encouraging youths to create critical counterstories (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) and counternarratives against the everyday disturbances they encounter (Desai, 2020; Gibson, 2020). It can also offer culturally affirming learning spaces wherein multiple cultural and linguistic identities of students are acknowledged as generative assets in cultivating their critical and transformative identities and agency (Bertrand et al., 2017; Mirra et al., 2015; Domínguez & Cammarota, 2021). Importantly, studies on YPAR could extend our understanding of how Asian American youths can build generative and transformative competencies to

(re)imagine social change and interruption in the cycle of oppression. Since critical “thinking” is one of the most humanistic and natural ways for one to learn (Arendt, 2000), YPAR provides a new way of learning for the youth of color who have been schooled through practices that “minimize or annul the students’ creative power and [...] stimulate their credulity” (Freire, 1972, p. 73).

As such, inquiry-based learning through YPAR could reveal new forms of equity-oriented educational spaces that recognize and build on youth’s experiential knowledge, hybrid and evolving identities, and transformative potential to participate in critical dialogues and reflexivity with regard to race. The foundations of YPAR value localized collective learning and the sharing of knowledge to advance asset-based critical learning by cultivating youths’ transformative and collective agency to help them (re)imagine themselves in expansive ways. Ultimately, YPAR has the potential to foster youth-initiated strategies for an innovative approach to collective action and support youth to explore new narratives and identity-affirming experiences through relationship-building, solidarity, and commitment to social justice youth development (Ginwright & James, 2002).

Conclusion

Young people in this study were conscientious of their racial positionings in the school and society, contending to the contradicting discourses regarding themselves and their communities. East and South Asian American youths frequently encountered the model minority and perpetual foreigner stereotypes and were prompted to conceptualize them within their daily lives. The daily struggles consisted of coping and withstanding the precariousness of being, living, and learning as those who are offered limited inclusion and representation within the “educational arrangements that lock them into second-class citizenship” (Gillen, 2014, p. 27).

However, students were strategic in that they knew how to negotiate and leverage their abilities and characteristics to maneuver the school system. Some students, despite comprehending the inequalities they faced, were receptive to the dominant discourse by remaining compliant as a protective response. Certain students voluntarily learned to challenge the conditions that sustain inequalities and acted consciously by rejecting or resisting the identities ascribed to them. It is important to note that the youths were also active beings as they exercised their agency of resistance in ways they know best by participating in this research and shedding light on their individual experiences within the larger collective. For some, this ethnography allowed for the expansion of their “inward gaze,” (Paris, 2021) which is directed at internalized oppression, and “critical self-reflection” (Adorno, 2005) that allowed them to become cognizant of dominant practices and institutional codification of students based on hegemonic ideologies. Students were also vocal and demanded qualitative changes in Redstone High School.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Table of Study Participants

Pseudonym	Role	Race/Ethnicity	Grade	Gender Identity
Christine Smith	Youth	Asian/Chinese	12	Female
Eve Yao	Youth	Asian/Chinese	11	Female
Zee An	Youth	Asian/Chinese	11	Female
Lilian Wu	Youth	Asian/Chinese	10	Female
Sunny Peng	Youth	Asian/Chinese	10	Female
Andrew Zhang	Youth	Asian/Chinese	10	Male
Etoile Zhou	Youth	Asian/Chinese	9	Female
Elsie Chen	Youth	Asian/Chinese	9	Female
Kayla Liu	Youth	Asian/Chinese	9	Female
Sam Wang	Youth	Asian/Chinese	9	Male
Peter Xin	Youth	Asian/Chinese	9	Male
Courtney Lin	Youth	Asian/Taiwanese	9	Female
Amar Bari	Youth	Asian/Indian	10	Female
Sarah Devi	Youth	Asian/Indian	10	Female
Farid Bhatia	Youth	Asian/Indian	10	Male
Nikhil Comar	Youth	Asian/Indian	10	Male
Ishaan Dhar	Youth	Asian/Indian	10	Male
Pradeep Agarwal	Youth	Asian/Indian	10	Male
Danveer Jha	Youth	Asian/Indian	10	Male
Ajay Kulkarni	Youth	Asian/Indian	10	Male
Dhruv Nair	Youth	Asian/Indian	9	Male
Diya Deep	Youth	Asian/Indian	9	Male
Sophia Kwan	Youth	Asian/Indian	12	Female
Melissa Jeong	Youth	Asian/Indian	12	Female
Clara Chang	Youth	Asian/Korean	10	Female
Jane Yang	Youth	Asian/Korean	10	Female
Ji Soo Hwang	Youth	Asian/Korean	10	Female
Leah Cho	Youth	Asian/Korean	10	Female
James Yoon	Youth	Asian/Korean	10	Male
Amy Kim	Youth	Asian/Korean	9	Female
Lilly Baek	Youth	Asian/Korean	9	Female
Katie Williams	Youth	White	12	Female
Junfeng Zhou	Parent	Asian/Chinese	N/A	Male
Uma Bari	Parent	Asian/Indian	N/A	Female
Shyla Devi	Parent	Asian/Indian	N/A	Female
Ji Hyun Lim	Parent	Asian/Korean	N/A	Female
Jae Min Chang	Parent	Asian/Korean	N/A	Male
Samuel Pearce	Faculty	White	N/A	Male
Crosby Wise	Faculty	White	N/A	Male
Alfred Fuller	Faculty	White	N/A	Male

Harrison Burke	Faculty	White	N/A	Male
Jeffrey Finley	Faculty	White	N/A	Male
Arthur Gardner	Faculty	White	N/A	Male
Tyler Thornton	Faculty	White	N/A	Male
Shong Chou Lo	Faculty	Asian/Hmong	N/A	Non-binary
Coraline Rose	Faculty	White	N/A	Female
Ellie Wilson	Faculty	White	N/A	Female
Katie Fisher	Faculty	White	N/A	Female
Mara Sawyer	Faculty	White	N/A	Female
Layla Patel	Faculty	White	N/A	Female
Kaitlin McLaughlin	Faculty	White	N/A	Female
Courtney Ruiz	Faculty	White	N/A	Female
Faith Miller	Faculty	White	N/A	Female
Morgan Wells	Faculty	White	N/A	Female
Louise Clarke	Faculty	White	N/A	Female
Eliza Wright	Faculty	White	N/A	Female
Natalie Becker	Faculty	White	N/A	Female
Julie Marshall	Faculty	White	N/A	Female
Jasmine Martin	Faculty	White	N/A	Female
Hallie Francis	Faculty	White	N/A	Female
Ruth Richardson	Faculty	White	N/A	Female
Amelia Watson	Faculty	White	N/A	Female
Aubrey Hyde	Faculty	White	N/A	Female
Kate Davies	Faculty	White	N/A	Female
Elyse Wade	Faculty	White	N/A	Female
Martha Griffiths	Faculty	White	N/A	Female
Kinsley Buckley	Faculty	White	N/A	Female
Mary Miranda	Faculty	White	N/A	Female
Huang Huan	Faculty	Asian/Chinese	N/A	Female
David Levy	Staff	White	N/A	Male
Josephine Miller	Staff	White	N/A	Female
Lindsey Robinson	Staff	White	N/A	Female
Josh Moore	Staff	Black	N/A	Male
Darian Brown	Staff	Black	N/A	Male
Owen Lee	Staff	Asian/Korean	N/A	Male
Sua Chue	Staff	Asian/Hmong	N/A	Female

Participant Demographics (n=75)	
East Asian/Chinese American	13
East Asian/Korean American	10
East Asian/Taiwanese American	1
South Asian/Indian American	14
Southeast Asian/Hmong American	2
White	33

Black	2
Youth	32
Parent	5
Faculty/Staff	39
Female	50
Male	25
Non-binary	1
Total	76

Appendix B: Table of Interview Participants

Pseudonym	Role	Race/Ethnicity	Grade	Gender Identity
Christine Smith	Youth	Asian/Chinese	12	Female
Eve Yao	Youth	Asian/Chinese	11	Female
Zee An	Youth	Asian/Chinese	11	Female
Lilian Wu	Youth	Asian/Chinese	10	Female
Sunny Peng	Youth	Asian/Chinese	10	Female
Etoile Zhou	Youth	Asian/Chinese	9	Female
Elsie Chen	Youth	Asian/Chinese	9	Female
Amar Bari	Youth	Asian/Indian	10	Female
Sarah Devi	Youth	Asian/Indian	10	Female
Farid Bhatia	Youth	Asian/Indian	10	Male
Nikhil Comar	Youth	Asian/Indian	10	Male
Ishaan Dhar	Youth	Asian/Indian	10	Male
Pradeep Agarwal	Youth	Asian/Indian	10	Male
Danveer Jha	Youth	Asian/Indian	10	Male
Dhruv Nair	Youth	Asian/Indian	9	Male
Diya Deep	Youth	Asian/Indian	9	Male
Sophia Kwan	Youth	Asian/Indian	12	Female
Melissa Jeong	Youth	Asian/Indian	12	Female
Clara Chang	Youth	Asian/Korean	10	Female
Jane Yang	Youth	Asian/Korean	10	Female
James Yoon	Youth	Asian/Korean	10	Male
Amy Kim	Youth	Asian/Korean	9	Female
Katie Williams	Youth	White	12	Female
Junfeng Zhou	Parent	Asian/Chinese	N/A	Male
Uma Bari	Parent	Asian/Indian	N/A	Female
Shyla Devi	Parent	Asian/Indian	N/A	Female
Ji Hyun Lim	Parent	Asian/Korean	N/A	Female
Jae Min Chang	Parent	Asian/Korean	N/A	Male
Samuel Pearce	Faculty	White	N/A	Male
Crosby Wise	Faculty	White	N/A	Male
Shong Chou Lo	Faculty	Asian/Hmong	N/A	Male
Huang Huan	Faculty	Asian/Chinese	N/A	Female
David Levy	Staff	White	N/A	Male
Josh Moore	Staff	Black	N/A	Male
Darian Brown	Staff	Black	N/A	Male
Owen Lee	Staff	Asian/Korean	N/A	Male
Lindsey Robinson	Staff	White	N/A	Female
Sua Chue	Staff	Asian/Hmong	N/A	Female

Participant Demographics (n=38)	
East Asian/Chinese American	9

East Asian/Korean American	7
South Asian/Indian American	13
Southeast Asian/Hmong American	2
White	5
Black	2
Youth	23
Parent	5
Faculty/Staff	10
Female	21
Male	17
Total	38

Appendix C: Interview Protocols

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol – East and South Asian American Youth

School

1. How long have you lived in the United States? Have you lived in other states or cities?
2. What is your grade?
3. What are some of your salient identities in school (race, ethnicity, gender, etc.)?
4. In your opinion, how are you treated by teachers and peers?
How are Asians treated by teachers and peers?
5. In your opinion, what do teachers think about Asians?
How is that different/similar to what they think of other students?
6. In your opinion, what are the expectations your teachers have of you?
7. How would you describe the relationships you have with your teachers?
8. Who are your closest friends?
Where did you meet them?
How did you become close friends with them?
9. How would you describe the relationships you have with other peers?
10. Can you walk me through what a typical school day looks like?
11. What helps you navigate and get through the day?
12. What is your favorite and least favorite part of school?
13. If you were a schoolteacher or administrative staff, what would you do differently?
What do you think the school should do differently?
14. What is different/similar between what you learn in school and what you learn at home or community spaces?
15. What are your future aspirations?
What are your academic goals?
What kind of career or job would you like to have?

Home

1. What are some of your salient identities at home?
2. How does your family/family members shape how you identify yourself?
3. How do you perceive your parents/caregivers?
4. How would you describe the relationships you have with your parents/caregivers?
5. What are the expectations of being part of your family?
6. What are the expectations your parents/caregivers have of you and your education?
How do they communicate those expectations? How does that make you feel?
7. What are the expectations you have for your parents/caregivers?
8. How would you describe the relationships you have with your siblings?
9. What are some messages you receive from your parents, siblings, and extended family?
10. How does your family support you in being successful?

Community (if applicable)

1. What are some of your salient identities within the community space(s)?
2. How does your community shape how you identify yourself?
3. What are some of the activities you participate in within your community?

4. How do you perceive your community/organization?
5. What are the expectations that you have of your community?
What are some messages you receive from your community and community members?
How do they communicate those expectations? How does that make you feel?
6. What are some benefits you gain from being part of the community?
7. What are some challenges you face from being part of the community?

Racial, Ethnic, and Cultural Identity

1. In your opinion, what does it mean to be Asian American? Chinese American?
2. What makes a person Asian American? Chinese American?
3. What sets you apart from students from other racial/ethnic groups?
4. Do you believe East and South Asian Americans face certain challenges in the U.S. because of their race/ethnicity?
Why or why not?
5. Do you believe there are certain values and approaches toward education and school that East and South Asian Americans share?
If so, why do you think that is?
How is that different from other racial/ethnic groups?

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol – Parents of East and South Asian American Youth

1. How would you describe your child?
2. How would you describe the relationship you have with your child?
3. Can you walk me through what your child's typical day looks like?
4. What academic and career goals do you have for your child?
5. What hopes and future aspirations do you have for your child?
6. How does the school help your child work towards those goals?
7. Do you believe East and South Asian Americans face certain challenges in the U.S. because of their race/ethnicity?
Why or why not?
8. If so, how are you, as a parent, helping to address those challenges?
9. Do you believe East and South Asian Americans have advantages in the U.S. because of their race/ethnicity?
Why or why not?
10. In your opinion, do East and South Asian American families have different values and approaches toward education than other racial/ethnic groups?
If so, what are the differences?

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol – Faculty/Staff

1. How long have you been teaching at the school?
2. Tell me how you became a teacher in your subject area.
3. Tell me about the students in your classroom.
4. How do you work with your students of color?
5. How would you describe the relationships you have with students of color? Asian students?
6. How are East and South Asian American students different or similar to students from other racial/ethnic groups?
7. Tell me about school culture.
8. What expectations do you have of your students? Students of color? Asian students?
9. What goals do you have for your students?
10. What are some pedagogical practices you employ in your teaching to help students of color become successful?
11. What do you find most rewarding about your work? Most challenging?
12. What are the ways in which the school aims to achieve equity?
13. What factors, if any, act as barriers when working with students of color?
14. If you are an admin, what are some things that you would want to change about the school?