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Banana or Bridge?

How Capitalism Impacts My Racial Identity

YuhTyng Tsuei

Everybody wants to feel like they belong somewhere or to something. People who advocate non-conformity and claim that they prefer to feel isolated are lying to society and themselves. As one former sociology student pointed out in his paper, “The self cannot exist without society, and society can’t exist without the self or the individual” (Hininangan 58). Ever since elementary school, I have always attempted to conform to my surroundings so that I could blend in and feel like I belonged somewhere. However, being one of the only Oriental faces in a school full of Caucasians hindered my attempts to blend into the crowd. Eventually, my Caucasian playmates looked beyond my race and accepted me as one of them, which resulted in my accepting myself to be one of them as well.

As I progressed through elementary school into junior high, and then into high school, my racial identity molded into a Caucasian role and I lost touch with my Chinese culture. I was content with my Caucasian racial identity until I arrived at Binghamton last August as a freshman. I noticed that most of the Asian student population embraced their culture by surrounding themselves with Asian friends, speaking to each other in various Asian dialects, and even eating Chinese food on campus. An awareness of my abnormal ra-

cial identity surfaced, which started causing me some discomfort and confusion.

In this paper I will try to answer the questions: Why have I not embraced my Chinese heritage and chosen to have a Caucasian racial identity, even though I am of 100% Chinese blood and descent? Why am I more comfortable befriending people of another race than those of my own?

In order to answer these questions, I will explore issues of race and racism, status groups, exhibitions of deviance, and how the capitalist world-system has affected my unconscious choice of adopting a Caucasian racial identity.

INTRODUCTION

A Banana in Bloom

Upon first glance at me, others have told me that my looks are deceiving. I am 100% Chinese, but have often been confused for being a “mix.” Strangers sometimes refuse to accept that I am not of any mixed blood and that both of my parents are full-blooded Chinese. I guess this is because I do not exhibit the stereotypical Chinese physical attributes: pale skin, small eyes, a flat nose and hardly noticeable eyebrows. In fact, I am the complete opposite. This is fitting for my character, because while I do not look very Chinese, I also do not feel it either. My mother likes to tease me and call me a banana, meaning that I am “yellow” on the outside but “white” on the inside—which is a reference made towards my racial identity.

My propensity to befriend people not of my race and my inability to relate to Asians never really bothered me until I left home and came to Binghamton. In fact, it was hardly ever an issue until recently; it was just something that I naturally accepted. I was born in Elmhurst, Queens, but moved to a pre-dominantly white suburb called Franklin Square on Long Island

when my younger sister YuhLi was born. 16 years after her birth and our move, we are still living in Franklin Square. Growing up, I had only white playmates and never thought of myself as different until fourth grade when I started getting teased for having “chinky eyes.” Fortunately, the taunts were very short-lived and I had no more problems after the fourth grade. This was the first time in my life that I realized my schoolmates did not reciprocate the perspective I held that they were the same as me.

My parents were always bothered by the fact that my sister and I had no background in Chinese except for when we were in our house, since there were no other Chinese children in the neighborhood that we could associate with. I think this bothered my parents more than it bothered my sister and me. At the age of six, I was enrolled in Chinese School, which met once a week on a Saturday morning at a local high school where Chinese families in the local area brought their children to further enrich or enhance their Chinese. This was my first and only exposure to Chinese friends for a long time, since 99% of my elementary school was white. For the next few years, I lived two lives: on weekdays I played with my white classmates from school, and then on weekends I played with my Chinese classmates from Chinese School. Eventually, I stopped hanging out with my white friends and primarily focused on my Chinese School crowd of friends. My best friends were friends from Chinese School: Connie, Helen and Christine. It was a very happy time because I felt more at ease with my Chinese playmates than my white playmates, and so did my parents. However, it did not last forever as my parents had probably hoped.

And so it begins...

As a freshman in high school, I decided

to join my school’s cross-country team because I wanted something extracurricular to do after school. On the team were two particular girls, Crystal and Melissa, who I became closer to as the season progressed. I enjoyed the time spent and the people on the cross-country team so much that when the season ended, and winter track started, I decided to join that too and then continued my running career with spring track. By the end of freshman year, Crystal and Melissa were the prime focus of the social realm of my world while Connie, Helen and Christine were quickly fading and becoming distant memories.

As I continued running track and cross-country throughout high school, my new best friends became Melissa and Crystal, who introduced more and more new friends to me after each summer that they attended running camp. It never bothered me at all that these new friends were almost always Caucasian and never Asian. In fact, I never even noticed it; it just felt natural for me to be making more and more white friends. Junior year I did make one Chinese friend from a neighboring town that I met at a track meet. Jenny and I got along well because we thought we were “2 peas in a pod”—the only Chinese people that we knew who were friends with white people. As my senior year of high school approached and went by, I had gone completely over to the “other” side: my best friend was a Jewish boy named Jason, my prom date was my [Irish] friend Bryan, and I had completely lost touch with Connie, Helen, and Christine. I would occasionally hear information about them like how Christine got into Cornell, or that Connie won some award, because our parents still had mutual friends but my entire world revolved around my track friends.

When I made my decision to go to Binghamton, it was a joke among my friends and me that I would be going to a school full of “my people” and that maybe I would finally become “Asian.” However,

I was definitely not prepared for the sights of Binghamton. During my first few weeks at Binghamton, I observed that many people stuck with people who were just like them. In other words, I noticed that Asian people usually hung out with Asian people, Indians with Indians, and so on. I concluded based on my observations that college was more “cliquey” than high school was. It also made me evaluate where my place was in the universe.

It became obvious that college was much like high school in that people with similar interests would band together and be friends because it just makes sense. For example, the track team hangs out with the track team, the crew team hangs out with the crew team, etc. But the way in which college differed from high school is that in college, it appears that your ethnicity can also be regarded as a “similar interest” so that people of the same ethnic background get together as well. This social grouping together based upon ethnicity is the source of my confusion and feeling of displacement—is that what I should be doing as well? Should I be finding Chinese students on campus and become friends with them since that appears to be the common trend on campus?

A Startling Revelation

Since I have been at Binghamton I have become more aware of an uneasy feeling of displacement among students due to my ethnicity. As one can conclude from what I’ve said so far, I never experienced this feeling earlier in life, I always felt like I belonged somewhere. However, now that I am older and more mature, I am starting to question whether or not it was a bad choice on my part to ignore my ethnic background and focus on becoming Americanized to fit in with my Caucasian peers. I have one sibling named YuhLi who is younger than I at 16 years of age. She has not become “white-

washed” like I have become. She listens to more Chinese music than English and hangs out with mostly Chinese friends whom she met at her current Chinese School.

This makes me wonder, How did two sisters who grew up in the same house at the same time be so different? I believe that it is due to the fact that we had different experiences growing up. I am the first-born, so I experienced everything first and basically paved the way for my younger sister. For example, while I had classmates teasing me for being Chinese in elementary school, my sister did not have any problems because when she entered school, she was known as “Tyng’s younger sister.” By then, I had earned the respect of my peers and teachers, so they reciprocated that respect onto YuhLi. Elementary school was the only time that I really felt alienated from everybody around me. I was becoming more aware that I was “different” and tried overcoming that by ignoring the problem and pretending that I was white just like everybody else was. Instead of being proud of the fact that I could share my Chinese heritage with my classmates, I grew to become ashamed of being Chinese. I saw my being Chinese as a burden rather than a blessing.

This way of handling my problem of alienation continued throughout junior high and high school, until it became unconscious—I forgot that I was just pretending and it eventually became the norm. It didn’t help that I had no Asian influences in my life. My parents tried rectifying that by sending my sister and I to Taiwan to visit relatives, but more importantly my sister and I were sent to experience the full extent of being Chinese in a place where we wouldn’t be looked upon as foreigners. The first time that I visited was when I was ten years old. At the time, I was still feeling uneasy about being Chinese but having Chinese friends from Chinese School helped ease the feelings of uneasiness. That first

summer in Taiwan was an unforgettable experience. I had never been completely submersed into the Chinese culture and did not know what to expect. Surrounding me on all sides were Chinese people, the language, and their customs. That trip to Taiwan helped me appreciate my culture a lot more and when I returned, I was excited to share with my American friends my summer experience. After the first trip, I went back to Taiwan two more times. I remember feeling more and more at home each time I set foot on Taiwan soil. The last time I visited, I remember thinking of Taiwan as my second home. The feeling of belonging and uniformity washed over me, which I had not been able to experience very much in my lifetime. However, that was many years ago and unfortunately I have not been able to return to Taiwan since.

My visits to Taiwan helped a great deal in provoking pride for my ethnicity. As I got older, I became less ashamed of being Chinese and instead took a different approach: I began to make it part of my identity. In the social circle of my friends, I was the only Asian and that became part of who I was. My friends and I kidded around about how I was responsible for bringing diversity into our group. However, I wasn't really bringing much diversity to the group except the physical attributes. I still attempted to conform to everybody else, as most teenagers do to try to fit in. I made no real attempts to bring my Chinese culture into the group and share it with them. I was still alienated, but this time it wasn't from my classmates. I felt alienated from the Chinese community and this alienation has continued, as I am experiencing it here at Binghamton.

Consequences

The alienation that I feel now is a different one from that I felt when I was younger. The alienation I felt when I was younger

was feeling like I didn't belong among my white peers. The alienation that I feel now is that I am older is feeling like I don't belong amongst my Asian peers. This worries me because I am becoming more and more aware that in my quest to assimilate with my white friends, I have caused my own alienation and as a result, I do not fully belong to either group of people. To my white friends, they will always view me as Asian. I am not sure how Asians on campus view me, since I have not made much effort to befriend any. However, I do know that I feel uneasy around them at times so that may indicate that I don't really belong in their social circle either. The consequences of my displacement have already started to affect me. I think that my feeling of not belonging anywhere will only increase as time progresses. When I attend Cornell next semester, I will probably encounter just as many Asian groups as I did here at Binghamton, if not more. After Cornell, I plan on attending law school and hopefully one day will become an attorney.

In *Habits of the Heart* Bellah writes,

In the sense of a 'career,' work traces one's progress through life by achievement and advancement in an occupation. It yields a self defined by a broader sort of success, which takes in social standing and prestige, and by a sense of expanding power and competency that renders work itself a source of self-esteem (Bellah et al. 67).

The self that I want to define will encompass my racial identity and without establishing an identity for myself, it will be difficult to establish a source of self-esteem that Bellah speaks about. In the workplace, I know that I will be judged for what I am first before I am judged for who I am. I am afraid that if I do not exhibit a strong grasp on my racial identity, then my colleagues will not take me seriously. The feeling of

displacement will surely prevail when I want to start a family. "People know what it means for their daily life to belong to a particular [ethnic group], but they seldom grasp how those affiliations influence their political choices or how many children they will have," says Walton (5). My choice for a husband will reflect on how I feel about my own identity, not to mention what I teach my children. How can I teach my children about their Chinese heritage if their own mother is ignorant of the Chinese culture? I am afraid that my fear and unwillingness to embrace my culture and heritage will be passed onto my children and cause my children to be even more confused about their own identities than I am now.

EXPLORATION

Keeping an open mind

Sociology explores the determinants of individual and collective behavior that are not given in our psychic or biological makeup, but fashioned in the broader arena of social interaction. Once these social influences are revealed they make intuitive sense; they explain something that we did not know before and would not have discovered by searching the contents of individual experience (Walton 5).

What Walton suggests above is that in order to determine why I am against my own race, I have to explore all aspects of my life, regardless of whether or not they are relevant to my uneasy sense of not belonging. I cannot rule out anything because if I just explore the "contents of individual experience" then I will not find the answers that I want. Instead, I have to evaluate my behavior that is "fashioned in the broader arena of social interaction," such as the influence my family and friends have had on

me throughout the years. Furthermore, Walton points out that "sociological reasoning and research is not a matter of discovering the unknown or of fabricating theoretical chimneys from factual bricks. Rather, it is a matter of making interpretive sense of facts, new and old" (Walton 43). This is why I have started to look upon my past and the views that I have amassed as a result of my experiences.

Being scared when I should feel welcome

I have always felt intimidated when I am around Asians whom I am not familiar or friendly with. Most may just attribute this to the simple fact that since I am amongst unfamiliar people, of course I would feel uncomfortable. However, I have noticed that if I am in the midst of Caucasians whom I am not familiar with, I do not feel the same kind of intimidation as I do when I am around Asians.

When I was in elementary school, I was taught by my parents to believe that because I was Asian and different from the people around me, I would have to work twice as hard to have people respect me. My parents embedded this idea into my head because they did not want me to have to experience the prejudice that they had experienced when they were international graduate students in the United States. In essence, I felt the same way as David Mura, a Japanese-American man who also felt very confused about his identity for the first half of his life. Mura reveals, "In the beginning, I bought into the model-minority myth, it was what was driving me. Then I reacted against it" (Mura 258).

My "rebellion" occurred during high school when I joined the track team and submersed myself into my new group of friends. This was the first time that I can remember exhibiting deviance in accordance to Walton's definition: "the social reaction

to conduct rather than conduct as such” (1993: 321). Walton further suggests that “Social control focuses on circumstances under which people conform to group expectations, the bases of that consensus, ...resulting in conduct judged as deviant in the individual and rebellious in the group” (1993: 317). Therefore, besides exhibiting deviance, my reaction against the model-minority myth was an example of social control, since I was looking to conform to group expectations. I had reached the age where my peers were starting to form their own self-identities and it became apparent to them that the identity that I was choosing was one that pushed my Chinese heritage aside for my upbringing in America. My peers noticed that I was attempting to assimilate with white America. This was also the time when some of my peers started commenting on how I was not like all the “other Asians” who stuck together. The positive reaction that I received from my friends only encouraged me to further embrace my pan-Asian identity.

What does capitalism have to do with me?

Wallerstein (1999) attributes the idea of “universal formal education” as a result of the workings of the capitalist world economy (126). Because of capitalism, education has become stressed more and more, particularly after 1945, resulting in proliferations of elementary schools, high schools, and institutions of higher learning (Wallerstein 126). However, as good as education is, there are innate consequences that many people are unaware of. Wallerstein writes, “[A consequence] of universal education has been the development and anchoring of the concept and individual reality of multiple ‘stages of life’” (Wallerstein 127). Instead of your basic childhood and adulthood, life has become further subdivided into categories such as early childhood,

middle childhood, early young adulthood, etc., usually categorized in accordance to which stage of schooling the person is in.

The great plus in this social differentiation of multiple life segments is said to be the specialized attention... [The great minus is] the large exclusion from full participation in power and material benefits of all those outside the now far narrower range of years defining... mature adulthood. Under the umbrella of egalitarian common passages through life’s stages, we have erected a quite rigid curvilinear age hierarchy which is probably more consequential than the less complex age hierarchies of previous historical systems (Wallerstein 127).

Because of the newly divided stages of life, an excessive emphasis has been placed on self and social identity. Bellah et al. contend (1996), “Adolescence as a peculiarly significant stage of life, with its ‘identity crises,’ received widespread attention in the late 1950s and 1960s” (81). And since then, it has been a commonly accepted characteristic of adolescence for one to want to “find” themselves and create a self-identity. Bellah continues, “[I]t is not surprising that Americans should grasp at some scheme of life stages or crises to give coherence to the otherwise utterly arbitrary life patterns they seem to be asked to create” (Bellah et al. 81). It was probably this belief system instilled in our society today that made me befriend white people quickly and easily. I felt social pressures to make an identity for myself, and it felt like something that I should be doing. And since I had no Asian influences near me, it is not surprising that I did not adopt an Asian racial identity.

My white track friends and I became a big group of friends very quickly—it was

almost instantaneous. As soon as we met one another, we became friends. It was very easy to become socially accepted in the group, probably because we were all in the same stage of life where we were trying to figure out our identities and therefore out of convenience, we all banded together and formed our own clique. According to *Habits of the Heart*, “Tocqueville was quick to point out one of the central ambiguities in the new individualism—that it was strangely compatible with conformism” (Bellah et al., 147). And that is exactly what my friends and I were doing. “[A]s Tocqueville observed, when one can no longer rely on tradition or authority, one inevitably looks to others for confirmation of one’s judgments” (Bellah et al. 148). Since we were all out there alone looking for an identity to form, we looked to each other for confirmation that our choice was the correct one—in part, each of our insecurities pooled together to form confidence in ourselves.

The pressure to make a social identity for myself can be synonymous with trying to find the right status group. Walton asserts, “Modern status groups are based on a distinctive set of qualities. Race, ethnicity, and national origin are everywhere important... Status groups are identified by the conventions they observe, by distinctive behaviors and customs” (Walton 181). The Caucasian status group and the Asian status group were very different. I noticed that the Caucasian status group had more freedom and were more carefree than the Asian status group was. While the Asians’ idea of a fun time on the weekend was going to the movies or having a nice quiet evening together in somebody’s room, the Caucasians spent their weekends shopping and partying. I was able to identify with the Caucasian status group a lot more easily and willingly.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

I am most guilty of all

In all honesty, I never gave the Asian race a chance to “prove” itself to me. The only time that I ever had close encounters with Asian friends was during my pre-adolescence period, a time when my self-identity was not an important concept to me yet. At that time, I didn’t even think much about the fact that Connie, Helen, and Christine were of the same race as I. They were just people that I got along very well with. According to Lavilla’s interview with Asian-American Eric Liu, Liu states, “Race in this country is accidental... [it is a] product of chance and circumstances and not necessarily of some kind of pre-ordained dictate” (Lavilla 18). One can conclude that race should not play an important role in judging a person since race is not pre-determined and is in existence almost by “accident.”

When I entered high school, I started labeling people according to their race, probably because everybody else around me was doing so as well. Even in high school I noticed that Asians hung out together, African Americans stuck together, and so on. Wallerstein points out that “[Racism was a] social process in which ‘biology’ defined position” (103). Labeling and judging people according to their race appears to be an unfair practice, because they are unable to have any say in what race they are, simply because it is a matter of genes and based upon your parents’ genes. However, I was just as guilty of labeling people by race as everybody else.

What was ‘white’ or upper stratum has of course been a social and not a physiological phenomenon, as should be evident by the historically-shifting position, in worldwide socially-defined ‘colour lines’, of

such groups as southern Europeans, Arabs, Latin American mestizos, and East Asians (Wallerstein 79).

White superiority is a social construct. If society decided to stop judging people by color, it can stop racism. "Racism was the mode by which various segments of the work-force within the same economic structure were constrained to relate to each other. Racism was the ideological justification for the hierarchization of the work-force and its highly unequal distribution of reward" (Wallerstein 78). I had viewed Caucasians as the people who received the biggest "reward" socially, meaning that they were the best accepted in social circles and I viewed Asians as the lower end of the hierarchy, who received less distribution of "reward" as Wallerstein suggests.

Wallerstein further asserts, "Racism was the stratification of the work-force inside the historical system, whose object was to keep the oppressed groups inside the system, not expel them" (Wallerstein 103). I never denied that Asians were part of the system and never tried to expel them. Instead, I kept them at bay and made Caucasians the focal point in my life instead. However, the Asian community never attempted to deny my existence as I did theirs. In a survey given to his Chinese students, Jason Liu, an English teacher in China, made some startling discoveries: "Some viewed Chinese Americans as still being part of the Chinese nation. They welcome "home" Chinese Americans who want to escape American prejudice" (Liu 8). While Caucasians sometimes tend to be prejudiced toward other Caucasians (i.e. prejudice against Canadians), Chinese people are always willing to accept other Chinese people, no matter the origin. "I want to call on Chinese Americans to come back. China is our country... Chinese Americans, regardless of whether you can speak Chinese and regardless of where you are from, come

back, distant wandering son" (Liu 8) was written by another student who obviously does not share the same prejudice against Asians as I do.

"People's cultural and social practices tend to be a by-product of the social and cultural environment they tend to gravitate towards" (Cacas 18). I definitely believe this is the case because I have always been surrounded by Caucasians in my life and therefore it was just natural for me to gravitate towards them. I am one of only two Asians in my circle of friends, the other Asian being my friend Jenny who is "whitewashed" like I am. Therefore, my white friends' perspective of Asians is what Jenny and I exhibit. This inhibits their ability to look beyond Jenny and me and see that there are other "kinds" of Asians out there. My white friends' inability to widen their eyes to the possibility of other Asians has hindered my own ability to let Asians into my life since my friends do have an impact on how I think. But as Cacas states, "...we are all citizens of the world who deserve freedom balanced with respect, equality, and dignity for each other as human beings" (Cacas 18) and I should stop looking at Asians as just Asians and see them more as human beings, because only then will I be able to relate with them, since under that perspective we are all similar then.

Again, what does capitalism have to do with me?

It is an obvious fact that I am living in the pre-dominantly Caucasian town of Franklin Square because that is where my parents chose to situate my family 16 years ago. It is also obvious that money was the major factor for their choice. But why was money such a major factor? And what does that have to do with my racial identity confusion?

Capitalism, social class, and status mo-

bility are to blame for the reason that I am not more comfortable with my Asian heritage. When my parents first got married in 1981, they were very poor and their financial situation did not significantly improve until towards the 90's. Statistics indicate that, "the share of national income in 1986 received by the highest paid, top fifth moved upward to 44%, while the share going to the poorest fifth declined to 5%..." (Walton 131). This statistic indicates how hard it was for my parents to save up enough money to move out to Long Island, famous for its high standard of living. If one is from Long Island, one would be aware that north shore towns such as Syosset, Great Neck, and Manhasset have significant numbers of Asian residents. These towns are also known for housing wealthy people. Or at least people wealthier than my family. Because of my parents' inability to acquire more income, they were not able to move into the more affluent towns of Long Island and had to settle in Franklin Square. If my parents were able to move to the more affluent towns, I would have been surrounded by more Asians and not have had as prominent a racial boundary as I experienced at school in Franklin Square. My parents were not able to experience social mobility earlier, before they started a family, so they could not move to the more affluent and Asian-inhabited towns. "Status mobility has increasingly depended on advanced education and competence in managerial and professional occupations that require specialized knowledge" (Bellah et al. 148). My parents' Masters degrees in America have enabled them to provide my family very comfortable living but it was very difficult in the early years.

Thus, my feeling of alienation from the Asian community can be partly attributed to social classes and my parents' inability to move up the social ladder when it was relevant. Walton discloses that "Classes under capitalism are experienced social relations—relations that people feel, for exam-

ple, in alienation or estrangement from one's labor, other people, and one's own self" (Walton 135). The class and relations that I eventually fell into in Franklin Square was the middle-class Caucasians, whereas if capitalism had worked in my parents' favor when I was born, my "self" could have perhaps been defined to be Asian-American, instead of being alienated from "Asian-ness."

ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVE

For the past few years, I have been plagued with the feeling of not fully belonging to any ethnic group. The impression that I need to and can only belong to one group or the other has left me feeling confused because I know that I can belong to both groups at the same time. My white friends have already accepted me as one of them, and I am sure that the Chinese community will accept me as long as I give them a chance. It is just up to me to decide whether I want to belong completely to only one group, or attempt to belong to both groups.

What if...

Wallerstein believes that "progress is not inevitable," we are just "struggling for it" (Wallerstein 107). The struggle that he speaks about is "that of a transition to a relatively classless society versus a transition to some new class-based mode of production" (Wallerstein 107). I believe that the term "class" includes race as a factor. If I lived my life in a classless society, then there would be no differentiations among the races and I would not be confronted with my current problem of alienation and displacement. However, it is unfortunate that we do not live in a perfect world where classes do not exist.

The Asian American identity is be-

coming something that, yes has a certain core of things, a certain core of being descended from, or at least one part of the family descended from, Asian. But beyond that, it's going to be harder and harder to say that if this person is Asian they will likely have this set of social beliefs or this set of cultural practices or this set of philosophical outlooks (Lavilla 18).

Being judged and categorized as being Asian probably isn't as bad as I keep thinking it is. As time progresses, the "Asian" may become less and less defined as the world mixes more and more together and becomes one big melting pot. On the other hand, as time progresses, the different races may also become more and more defined so that the boundaries will be clear cut with no controversial gray area to be debated about. Eric Liu believes that "[A tendency for people of color] is to try to harden things to one form or the other" (Lavilla 18) and that is exactly what I have been trying to do. Maybe I shouldn't be trying to conform to solely one group.

From Banana to Bridge

Instead of trying to become part of one world, I should try to embrace being fortunate enough to have a foot in two worlds—to become a bridge. I should try to take Eric Liu's advice in "...imagining myself beyond race... keeping color at arms length, to kind of stumbling upon my racial identity, that kind of accidental nature of realizing that you are not race-less and you needn't always pretend you are race-less" (Lavilla 18). When Eric Liu, former speechwriter for President Clinton, MSNBC commentator, and author was interviewed, he suggested that Asian Americans "embrace the in-between. We're in-between a lot of things right now. We're in-between black and

white, but our own identity, this Asian-American identity, is in-between, it's in flux right now, whether by intermarriage or globalization or whatever, and that we should embrace it" (Lavilla 18). I've spent this entire time being afraid and ashamed of my not belonging anywhere while I should be courageous and be proud of it and welcome it. Eric Liu claims that it is OK to not pretend that people are race-less and to appreciate everybody's differences and attributes that add diversity to our lives.

Bellah presents the same idea that Eric Liu presented—accepting and embracing one's heritage. Introduced into Bellah's book is the character of Angelo Donatello, who was also a confused individual due to his lack of cultural identity. Bellah writes "Remembering his heritage involved accepting his origins, including painful memories of prejudice and discrimination that his earlier efforts at 'Americanization' had attempted to deny" (Bellah et al. 157). So I must also accept that I am Chinese and cease to deny that inevitable part of my life—although in doing so, it may be painful remembering why I denied that I was Chinese in the first place.

CONCLUSION

I've felt the same way as David Mura did: "I'd elevated whiteness, I'd inculcated its standards of beauty, I'd believed on some deep level in the myth of white superiority" (Mura 232). When I arrived at Binghamton, my belief in the myth was still strong since up until I arrived here I was still used to hanging out with mostly white people and surrounded by mostly white people at home.

The belief crumbles...

In the wake of this self-exploration, I have started to stray from the view of white superiority. I have come to a few conclu-

sions as a result of this paper. One of the first conclusions is that I am how I am today due to nurture, and not because of nature. If my younger sister were the same way as I in having confusion over her racial identity, then I would blame my problem on nature in the way I was raised. However, that is not the case. In the past year or so, I have witnessed my sister going through a major change, similar to the change I went through when I joined track and made my new circle of friends. However, YuhLi is making the opposite choice I did. She has started ignoring her white friends at school and is focusing her world on her Chinese friends. On weekends my sister and her friends like to take the train into Flushing or Chinatown and go shopping and eat in little Chinese restaurants. When my sister downloads music, she searches for her favorite Asian artists instead of searching for Jennifer Lopez or Janet Jackson like I do. Thus, I am the problem, and not my immediate home surroundings.

Before I began this paper I could not understand how capitalism would play a part in my search for self-identity. Nevertheless, I can now see very clearly its role. I have concluded that from the very beginning, if my parents were able to achieve better social mobility into a higher economic class, they would have perhaps chosen to move to another town other than the predominantly Caucasian Franklin Square that I live in now. As a result, I may have grown up being surrounded by more Asians and become assimilated with them and not grow any prejudice against them like I had up until this paper. As I had mentioned earlier, capitalism also is an intrinsic cause for dividing up life into stages (i.e. childhood, adolescence, adulthood), which is partly a result of easier access to public schooling. Thus, capitalism forced my adolescent self to find a self-identity that, as a matter of convenience, gravitated towards surrounding friends who all unfortunately held Caucasian identities.

One startling and unsettling conclusion that has arisen is that I exhibit racist tendencies towards my own race. Like my Caucasian friends, I have always been quick to judge other Asians that I do not know before I get to know them. As a young girl I was subjected to the racist attitudes of my peers who had a stereotypical misconception of who I was. Ironically, ten years later I am exhibiting the same kind of prejudice towards Asians that I was a victim to earlier.

Looking with an open heart

Now that I am more aware of the reasons for my racial identity confusion, I can make a conscious effort to rise above them. Upon noticing all the Asians who gather together on campus, I am starting to see them differently and am slowly ceasing to believe that whites were the “better” race to be. Instead, I see the two ethnicities as their own equal entities, and have come to accept that the white community is just the entity that I choose to be a part of. My inner nurture correlate more with Caucasians than Asians, so that is why I have had relative ease befriending Caucasians so far. It is not necessary for me to find any other reason for my preference to hanging out with Caucasians, other than the fact that it is my own personal preference and that is justified in itself.

Since having written this paper, I have come to feel more at ease with my sense of displacement. I no longer view it as displacement, because that word reveals negative connotations. I would like to think of it more as sharing myself with all the cultures and races that I relate to, whether it is genetic or not. I will no longer be afraid to be Asian among my Caucasian friends, and will no longer be scared to be white among my Asian peers because there is nothing to be ashamed of. Park believes, “Our inclusion into the American process turned out

to be our worst form of oppression. Most people are proud to call themselves Americans, but why would you want to become a productive, well-adjusted citizen when the primary requisite of American-ness is racism?" (Park 67) As a displaced person in terms of racial identity, I can understand Park's view because as I concluded earlier, I have been suffering from the same racism. My comfort in hanging out with Caucasians, or being "American," has resulted in my having racist attitudes towards people of my own kind, that being the Asians. As an Asian trying to be American, I have felt oppressed in denying my own racial identity. "We became pathetic victims of whiteness... It is so important for the American racial hierarchy to keep us consuming its ideals so that we attack ourselves instead of the racial neuroses it manufactures" (Park 68).

I realize that what Park says above is the quintessence of what I have been feeling. Because of the fact that I have become whitewashed, I started attacking my own race and failed to see what I was doing.

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