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A Conundrum for the East Asian American Woman: Gender & The Perception of The White American Man

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A Conundrum for the East Asian American Woman:
Gender & The Perception of The White American Man

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College

By
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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

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Preface

My mother shares a story about her relationship with my father's mother that was truly moving. She retains this memory sharing it with her children, "Your Grandmother Nai Nai, Helen Chou did not speak English fluently and really wanted a daughter-in-law or son-in-law who spoke Mandarin so she could talk to them. I always felt bad and inadequate because I was born in New York so my Mandarin was poor, meaning I could not converse freely with them. Luckily, Helen definitely wanted her children to marry someone Chinese so that was a definite plus for me. Ye Ye, your Grandfather was so happy that your Dad was marrying someone Chinese that he didn't mind that my Mandarin was so poor. But at my wedding to your father, one of your father's family members brought her Caucasian-White boyfriend and Grandma Helen was so upset about that because she felt she lost face in front of 300 guests and brought shame to the wedding of two Chinese families. She refused to seat him until the very end when everyone else was seated."

Chapter 1: Introduction

Interracial relationships are increasing and are necessary to be studied by social scientists. By the early 21st century, there were approximately 1.6 million interracial or interethnic marriages, making up 3% of all marriages (U.S. Census 2017). This paper is an endeavor to study this topic further. For my senior project, I am exploring the interracial relationships between East Asian American women and White American men. I look at their relationship dynamics such as how they interact, what attracts them to one another, and the roles they have in their relationship. I am specifically assessing relationships between second-generation East Asian women and White American men. The East Asian women I interviewed come from China, Korea, Burma, and Vietnam. I gathered responses to identify if any influence exists from gender or racial stereotypes by learning about their experiences. The objective of this study is to understand how these stigmas impact or alter the dynamics of these relationships. I examine these interracial relationships to understand how and why White American men and East Asian American women form romantic relationships. The research objective is to inspect and recognize racial, ethnic or cultural differences within interracial relationships and how these couples manage these differences.

The term “Asian American” is an individual who is American but of Asian descent. “The construction of 'Asian American' is a process that involves recognition of the shared personal experiences and orientations of Asian-origin persons, including that of being racially labelled as Asian by the dominant society, of growing up in an Asian home, and of adhering to the Asian values of an emphasis on family, education, hard work and respect for elders.” (Kibria 1997, p. 523). While living in America, these Asian individuals still have their traditions yet become

accustomed to American culture. This culture is considerably different from Asian traditions. In certain East Asian cultures, family and education are always put first. One will always listen to their elders and never disagree or argue. If East Asian individuals, especially women and young ones, go against these values based on traditions, they are considered disrespectful and dishonorable. Therefore even though these individuals are American, they still have their strong culture and values. The second generation is also defined through incorporation and assimilation which involves the absorption of this generation into the dominant, white middle-class groups in American society.

Incorporation and assimilation must be distinguished. "Incorporation points to the possibility of closing the gap between stigmatized categories of persons-persons whose particular identities have been relegated to the invisibility of private life-and the utopian promises that in principle regulate civil life, principles that imply equality, solidarity, and respect among members of society." (Alexander, p. 242). Incorporation is the act of closing the gap between two societies creating equality and respect among both of the categories of people. Assimilation is a mode of incorporation making incorporation the umbrella term in which assimilation falls below. Assimilation is a process of incorporation that achieves the extension and transformation in a distinct way. "Assimilation takes place when out-group members are allowed to enter fully into civil life on the condition that they shed their polluted primordial identities" (Alexander, p. 243). In order to fully assimilate, one must leave behind their old identities and their old lifestyles. That way, they can experience full assimilation by letting go of their old beliefs and values.

History of Interracial Marriage

Interracial marriages in the United States were illegal until 1967 and have become more and more frequent in American society ever since. According to Richard Lewis, interracial marriages have increased drastically since 1960. There were 157,000 interracial marriages in 1960 and by 2010 there were 2,413,000. This represents a fifteen-fold increase over a fifty year period (Lewis 2013, p. 16). It is important to look back at the past history of this topic and to consider where we are now; which brings us to this point in time where we see interracial marriages more commonly.

According to Peggy Pascoe, there was massive prevention of interracial marriage in the 1860s through laws that prohibited miscegenation. These laws prohibited the “interbreeding” of two people who were considered to be of different races. They targeted both interracial sex, as well as marriage. In 1967, these laws were considered unconstitutional. *Loving v. Virginia* was a Supreme Court case on June 12, 1967, that took place in Virginia with plaintiffs Richard and Mildred Loving, a White man and a Black woman. This case was a great turning point that deemed biological race as a significant category in U.S. marriage (2016, p. 11). The case challenged centuries of American laws banning miscegenation. Since then, there has been a rise in marrying out of one's own race. According to Wendy Wang, “among all newlyweds in 2010, 9% of Whites, 17% of Blacks, 26% of Hispanics and 28% of Asians married out. Looking at all married couples in 2010, regardless of when they married, the share of intermarriages reached an all-time high of 8.4%. In 1980, that share was just 3.2%.” (2012, p. 1).

Because marriage has come so far in terms of interracial marriages, it is fascinating to observe these interracial marriages in our society and how others respond to it today. These

couples must be very aware of “the fact that partners in inter-group relationships can experience intense disapproval and social pressure” from members of both races. (Bratter 2006, p. 1026). Although both *Loving v. Virginia* and Bratter’s study were based on a White man and a Black woman, it applies to all race categories. There has been an abundance of research done on the White and Black experience and their relationships. However, there is much less done on other smaller race groups. Therefore much of the literature and understanding has come from the relationships between Black and White groups.

Other race categories have remained behind the scenes and are less researched and regarded than the original binary category Black and White. In *Seeing More Than Black and White*, Elizabeth Martinez states “like Latinos, Asian Americans have also been officially counted as White in some historical periods. They have been defined as “colored” in others, with “Chinese” being yet another category. Like Mexicans, they were often seen as not really White but not quite Black either. Such ambiguity tended to put Asian Americans along with Latinos outside the prevailing framework of racism.” (Anderson 2015, p. 181). This adds to the model minority myth as many believe Asians are not the subject of racism since they are seen and considered as close to White. This causes less focus to be on Asian Americans as a presence in America.

This project specifically focuses on East Asian American and White Americans as there is quite a high percentage of both interracial marriages and relationships in the United States. Zhenchiao Qian of Brown University states that “Japanese and Chinese Americans, who have lived in the United States for several generations, have the highest rate of interethnic marriage.” The percentage of Asian Americans in the United States has gone up to 3.5 percent of the

population in 2001. From knowing this data, Asian Americans, especially in interracial relationships, become more assimilated in American society through these relationships (Ruf 2001). According to Joel Perlmann, Harris and Ono found that within married Asian women 68% are in-married, 25% are married to Whites, 4% are married to Hispanics, and 2% are married to Blacks (2001). This 25% of women married to Whites is what I am choosing to focus on within this paper.

Harry H.L. Kitano found that in general, intermarriage is most popular between White Caucasian men and mostly Japanese, Chinese and then Korean women (1984). This can be explained by the increasing presence of Asian Americans in the United States. In 2017, the population totals 4,948,000 for Chinese, 1,822,000 for Koreans, and 1,411,000 for Japanese (López 2017). From interpreting this data, Asian Americans are a growing population within the United States; therefore, their presence has become more established in American society through these interracial relationships. Whites alone make up 76.6% of the total population within the United States (U.S. Census 2017). Comparing the population sizes of Asian Americans (3.5%) and White Americans (76.6%) show that Asian Americans are the much smaller population which makes it more likely for Asian Americans to marry out into the majority of the population in the United States.

Before diving into the interviews, one would want to understand what research has already been done on why and how intermarriage occurs. There has been social disapproval of intermarriages as immigrants were seen as outsiders and were excluded from mainstream society. For example, until 1967, there was the anti-miscegenation law in the United States that forbade Black-White unions in many states (Törngren 2016, p. 498). Therefore there has been

social disapproval nowadays based on past events and social beliefs. “In societies such as the US, Germany, and South Africa, intermarriages have been legally banned. Even though such laws do not exist today, the impact of such historical and legal sanctions is still profound.” (Törngren 2016, p. 498). These laws signify the social opinions at the time they were implemented showing that there was immense social disapproval against intermarriages. From another stance, because laws were what people followed and trusted when they were revoked, certain people may still have had this mindset against immigrants; therefore interracial marriage can be unwanted. Social norms have been constantly changing over time. Now people have begun to be more open minded as intermarriages are transgressive, occurring and breaking the social norms that are present today.

Intermarriages are controversial as they are viewed by people as negative due to how intermarriage signify the assimilation and integration of immigrants into society. Certain scholars now believe that amalgamation is where ethnic and racial traits are exchanged promoting assimilation. In 1961, Milton Gordon discussed his three reasons why America takes in immigrants since people are constantly immigrating into the United States. For the purposes of this paper, we must understand how East Asian Americans adjust to the American lifestyle and how it impacts their romantic relationships.

"Anglo-conformity" is a broad term used to cover a variety of viewpoints about assimilation and immigration; they all assume the desirability of maintaining English institutions (as modified by the American Revolution), the English language, and English-oriented cultural patterns as dominant and standard in American life.” (Gordon 1961, p. 265). Gordon is convinced that this ideology of assimilation is the more prevalent theory out of the others.

Maintaining American culture and American norms remains desirable and is considered superior. The second reason is the “Melting Pot” which “refers to a fresh environment where American society is evolving into a totally new blend, culturally and biologically, in which the stocks and folkways of Europe, figuratively speaking, were indiscriminately mixed in the political pot of the emerging nation and fused by the fire.” (Gordon 1961, p. 270). Lastly, “Cultural Pluralism” is where old culture is preserved within an ethnic enclave in the United States where immigrants of similar race come together to form a community. This allows for the creation of an organization/society where immigrants can communicate and maintain familiar traditions within a comfortable environment (Gordon 1961, p. 274). These three different ideologies of assimilation show how there are different ways of how immigrant groups such as East Asians will adapt to American society.

Structural Assimilation is where absorption of an ethnic group into dominant society can occur based on assimilation. “An ethnically homogeneous marriage creates a family that can pass on to children the values and cultural forms of that particular ethnic group.” (Lieberson 1988, p. 163). Gordon believes that assimilation is the last step for immigrants to achieve and rise to the level of primary groups. There are several scholars who have also agreed that through the family and marrying into the primary race group, complete assimilation can result in this way. Furthermore, there are different forms and theories of assimilation that can be understood.

Segmented Assimilation has to do with what kinds of human capital people arrive with and thus enter into the job market with. This is a concept where different immigrant groups will assimilate into different sections of society achieving a higher status or lower status. “The concept of segmented assimilation is introduced to describe the diverse possible outcomes of this

process of adaptation. The concept of modes of incorporation is used for developing a typology of vulnerability and resources affecting such outcome” (Portes 1993, p. 74). Evidence shows within socioeconomic and residential assimilation; assimilation is happening unevenly. (Alba and Nee 1997, p. 826). Based on the uneven distribution of immigrants and social factors, assimilation theories regarding intermarriage differ as it can impact how these couples may or may not come together.

Along similar lines, Richard Alba and Victor Nee discuss Ethnic Stratification where it refers to uneven distribution based off systems of inequality in which some group memberships allow for different rankings and rewards within society. Location can also impact how different groups will benefit. Since a member of a racial minority may improve their position achieving upward mobility, "ethnic identity, in those areas in which it makes a difference, places a ceiling upon the extent to which he can rise" (Shibutani and Kwan, 1965:33) (Alba 1997, p. 838). This leads to how different groups will ultimately have different statuses.

Additionally, Spatial Assimilation according to Massey (1985) is where views of the spatial distribution of groups come about as a reflection of their human capital and the state of their assimilation (Alba and Nee 1997, p. 836). Where one lives is a good indicator of how well they are doing. Members of minority groups will strive for success within their group leaving behind the less successful and attempt “to convert occupational mobility and economic assimilation into residential gain, by "purchasing" residence in places with greater advantages and amenities.” (Alba and Nee 1997, p. 837). This leads to immigrants purchasing more expensive homes in expensive neighborhoods to promote positive external reflection of their human capital.

As immigrants may end up in a different economic situation than they began with, they end up existing within a different social group; this is called Spatial Assimilation. The social group that one exists in becomes crucial in impacting who the individual will choose as a partner. Partners are usually chosen based on Endogamy and Homogamy meaning people who choose those who are closer to them in location, status, and class. Endogamy is where people marry within their group and Homogamy is where people choose to marry people close in status. Endogamy and Homogamy are often analyzed with respect to race/ethnicity, religion, and socioeconomic status (Kalmijn 1998, p. 395). In this paper's case, homogamy for intermarried couples prompts couples to end up together as a result of their similar lifestyles and interests.

Since immigrant groups are typically smaller in population size compared to the local population, this shows structural constraints within society for marriage. It is highly likely that immigrant groups will marry out into the local population merely based on the numbers. The immigrant group has less of their own to choose from therefore they will marry out. Blau discusses how "a group's relative size is inversely related to the proportion of its members who are outmarried" (Blau 1982, p. 45). This theory of marrying out shows how because of population sizes, immigration groups are normally surrounded more by the dominant group and less surrounded by their population group. This then increases the likelihood of outmarriage into the dominant society. However, this paper is not about why East Asians are marrying out, but rather about other aspects such as the impacts of social behavior norms within the United States like gender that lead these women to be more attracted to White American men. The statistics are clearly important as it is another factor that shows how these couples unite. Having said that, I

focus on more of the gendered and racial aspects that influence why people marry certain people and more on the dynamics of the relationship.

Intermarried couples join together and do so in different ways. There are more theories that have not been touched upon here. Lieberman and Waters states the factors that impact intermarriage where the popularity of intermarriage is affected by “the availability of partners within and outside national, religious, racial, and ethnic lines but also by the degree of commonality in social status, such as class, between the different groups, the existence of formal sanctions such as anti-miscegenation laws, and informal sanctions such as taboos associated with intermarriage (Lieberman and Waters, 1990). All of these factors combine to impact how interracial couples unite as well as how scholars construct different theories of assimilation for intermarriages.

Impact of Culture

In order to understand the relationship between East Asian American women and White American men, we must understand the two cultures that the two derive from as well as how these type of couples increase. Although there are difficulties with ethnocentrism, interracial couples remain on the rise. Ethnocentrism refers to the evaluation of other cultures according to the basis of one’s own culture. Power, privilege, wealth, and status can play a role with these two groups of White men and Asian American women in determining how they come together. With these Asian American women and White American men, sharing of cultures with their knowledge is necessary. Especially since these individuals are based in the United States, which accounts to how Asian American women become further assimilated in America.

Racial stereotypes are very prevalent in media in how it represents East Asian culture in American society. Kumiko Nemoto shows how there is great overlap with race and gender as Asian women are portrayed as hyper-feminine, exotic and provocative while White American men are on the opposite end as hypermasculine (2006). Furthermore, studies done in these relationships have shown that Asian women are frequently fetishized for being Asian and submissive (Nemoto 2006, p. 31). White men are more desirable as they are seen as more financially secure and able to provide socioeconomically. Asian cultures are often lumped into one and it is common in the United States for people to think that the multiple cultures and people are the same because of how the census groups all into one category of Asian. Within the majority of these cultures, traditional values in family obligations and future goals are important aspects in East Asian American women's lives.

Family

Family pressures can be quite intense and life-changing as there are certain traditions within different cultures that require members to follow. In certain Asian traditional cultures such as China, Korea, and Japan, the majority follow Confucianism (Kobayashi 1999, p. 18). Under the Confucian moral code which accords male superiority, authority, and power over women in family and social relations has also influenced the patriarchal systems of Korea and Vietnam (Kibria 1997). Women are granted little decision-making power and are not expected an individual identity apart from their family role, which emphasizes their service to their male counterparts. A woman who violates her role in her partnership brings shame to herself and her family (Pyke 2003, p. 38).

In an interview performed by Nazli Kibria, Sandra, a 29-year-old Korean-American, born in the United States, discusses her great pressures to marry someone of their same race from her parents who express their traditional ideals onto her. Her father “went to great lengths to establish how important it was for the continuity of the family line that she 'marry Korean'. His remarks, as recounted by Sandra, are particularly interesting in the light of the fact that in the patrilineal Korean family system, daughters do not carry on the family name but enter, upon marriage, into the family descent group of their husband. It is as if their child is putting an end to their history and culture” (Kibria 1997, p. 530). Thus, Sandra’s parents do not want her to fall into the family system of another culture because she may lose her old one as it is the man who carries the family name. However, in another scenario, Irene, a 25-year-old Chinese American born in the United States had parents who were divorced. In Chinese communities, women are often blamed for a failed marriage. It is usually the woman who is not good enough or could not support her husband (Nemoto 2006, p. 32). There has been immense pressure on East Asian women to do a lot of their husbands on the basis of following East Asian family traditions.

This strong emphasis on family is extremely present in East Asian cultures. “More than half (54%) say that having a successful marriage is one of the most important things in life; just 34% of all American adults agree. (The Rise 2013). Although these statistics represent the term Asian, we must be aware that there are many subgroups of this term. In addition, it must be understood the difference between traditional culture and Asian American second generation and later cultures. For newly married Asians, “the likelihood of intermarriage is closely related to whether they were born in the U.S. or abroad” (Mitchell 2017). “The most important variable

related to outmarriage is generation, with the third generation out-marrying at a higher rate than the first generation.” (Kitano 1984, p. 189).

The making of good sons and daughters is extremely important in East Asian culture. (Rosalind S. Chou). Children are born to be completely obedient and born with certain beliefs. In addition, East Asian society parents tend to want a child who is male over female as they carry down the family name. Being born as a female already puts one at a disadvantage because being a female-bodied individual was inferior (p. 29). East Asian daughters are groomed to be loyal and to essentially find a partner.

The Asian American Identity

For second-generation Asian Americans, research has shown that there tends to be a disconnect between their traditional culture and the culture in which they grew up in. They have an issue with “fitting in” within both cultures but may actually feel more comfortable with American culture depending on how long they have lived in the United States. But for an Asian American living in the United States, people usually see you as Asian before they treat you as American. Irene, who was mentioned earlier, “always had felt foreign and missed a sense of racial and cultural belonging. She said, “When I go back to Taiwan, I don’t really feel like I fit in there. But when I’m here, I don’t feel like I’m fitting in here... I’m not one hundred percent... I’m American but... I was born here, but I’m still a minority.” Irene felt that she was always a foreigner and that she would never be the same as White people in this country.” People like Irene often will receive questions like how come you have such good English? How come you have an American name? (Nemoto 2006, p. 32). Therefore there will always be that physical

appearance detachment that East Asian Americans feel. This leads her to date both White and Asian American men.

When discussing assimilation and acculturation into American culture, it is essential to take a look at how Asian Americans are seen within the United States. These East Asian women of second-generation acculturate out of necessity to fit in and become accepted with American society. There is a belief that, as the model minority, Asians are the closest to White Americans than other minorities. “Lee (1996) has explained that Asian Americans themselves also used the term "Asian American" in order to combat racism.” The term “Asian American” was used as a unifying force in order to fight racism since the population group was too small to fight it effectively alone. “The media portrayal of Asian Americans was that, as a whole, they were a quiet and uncomplaining minority because there were also some Asians involved in the Civil Rights movement.” (Kobayashi 1999). Despite the belief that Asian Americans have somehow “made it” in our society and are “immune” to racism, widespread prejudice and discrimination continue to take a toll on their standard of living, self-esteem, and psychological well being (Wong & Halgin, 2006)” (Sue 2017). This is significant because East Asians are rarely outspoken as they are quieter in political scenes. Therefore we must explore how others may believe how Asian Americans have assimilated the right way and understand how East Asians attempt to incorporate themselves into society.

Gender

According to Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman, doing gender is defined as an unnatural phenomenon. It means society is “creating differences between girls and boys and

women and men, differences that are not natural, essential, or biological.” (1987, p. 137). I will define gender and define masculinity and femininity in order for readers to fully understand what I am referring to. I define masculinity as macho, manly, high power, controlling, independent individuals, typically referring to men. Femininity tends to be defined as dainty, dependent, soft-spoken, shy, also commonly referring predominantly to women. These stereotypes allow people to see why Asian American women have appealing traits to White American men and vice versa. I want to also see if gender gets reconstructed, performed, and accomplished in their relationships in specific ways for these interracial partnerships between East Asian women and White American men.

Gender is significant in this conversation because in the literature about gender, there were trends of White men marrying Asian women and less so White women marrying Asian men. In several studies, Asian American women are twice as likely to outmarry than Asian American men which is unique to Asian Americans as other races have men marrying out more often than women. “There were so-called problems after World War II of White men marrying Japanese women because they said and believed that Japanese women were more “feminine” than White women” (Kitano 1984, p. 9). Also, several interviews also showed that East Asian women had reactions to East Asian male dominance among “old-fashioned males” in the “traditional male role”. Asian women felt these ways were too rigid (Kitano 1984, p. 186). These traditions lead certain East Asian women to not want to marry East Asian men. As the literature shows, East Asian American Women and White American men choose one another because of cultural reasons and beliefs.

Furthermore, in American culture, men are socialized to fear being considered feminine as it has an association with homophobia. In *Dude You're a Fag* by C.J. Pascoe, boys police their own actions by using the term fag in relation to being homosexual. Thus, the boys do everything they can to avoid being called this term (2005). As well as in the chapter, "Masculinity as Homophobia" by Michael S. Kimmel, "as adolescents, we learn that our peers are a kind of gender police, constantly threatening to unmask us as feminine, as sissies (Anderson 2015, p. 231). Manhood is very much equated with power, over almost everything which acts as a form of social control for men.

I would like to explore more in-depth about whether White men believe Asians are more feminine and White American men are seen as more masculine. In addition, if femininity and masculinity play such a large role in these relationships and marriages. In Nemoto's text, she attempts to understand the relationship Asian American women have with hegemonic White masculinity which is fascinating to think about and to truly understand (2006). With gender, it seems that what is considered attractive in heterosexual marriages are masculinity and femininity. This is important to understand more in depth in the relationships that are formed within our society as one may be more subordinate and the other more of a dominant individual. This project will more specifically talk about the amalgamation of Asian American women and White American men and how families, cultural differences, and masculinity impact it.

White American men are viewed within America very highly. They are considered as very powerful and successful. Asian women look at White American men and see them as the possessors of superior socioeconomic capital. "Frankenberg writes, "[W]hitenedness is made out of materials that include socioeconomic status, cultural practice, peer group acceptance, parental

teaching and community participation.” ... “Asian American women often view marriage with White men as one of the few available ways through which they can gain upward mobility and assimilate as “Honorary Whites.” (Nemoto 2006, p. 36). Thus, marrying a White American man would symbolize successful assimilation into America obtaining respect at the same level as a White American man.

In addition to socioeconomic capital, physical appearance is also a factor for Asian American women when looking for a partner. White American men are seen as physically larger. The White male body has become the model masculine body sending messaging of the man’s body as being strong, tough, independent. While it also emits masculine imagination such as aggression, competition, strength, success, competence, reliability, and control (Nemoto 2006, p. 46). Nemoto’s interviews with Asian American women had a common trend of “an aversion toward Asian and Asian American men, due to their small physical size and attitude of ethnic patriarchy.” (Nemoto 2006, p. 43). In contrast to White American men, Asian American men are seen as smaller in physical size and have negative characteristics that are found in connection to size. Grace states that she believes a lot of Asian guys feel inferior to Caucasian guys and they feel like they have to work to make up for their looks so they act rude and mean to girls to try to act macho (Nemoto 2006, p. 45). From this study, it is as if Asian men are not courteous to women with the hope of appearing more masculine.

The East Asian American Woman Stereotype

As stated earlier, women especially East Asian women in media, are hypersexualized and seen as extremely feminine, lacking a strong personality and are extremely compliant. “White

men believe that Asian women are great girlfriends, wait hand and foot on men, and don't back-talk or give them shit. Asian women have beautiful skin and are just sexy and have silky hair." One Korean American woman indicated that she is frequently approached by White men who are very forthcoming with their "Asian fetishes" of subservience and pleasing them sexually. (Sue 2017, p. 94).

In addition, "when White men fetishize "Asian" women as their love objects, their objectification of the race and culture of the "other" can cause a sense of emotional tension and racial alienation for Asian American women." (Nemoto 2006, p. 31). Certain women strongly resist their fetishization, while others try to compromise with it. Women who are put in these situations sometimes react with disbelief that they are being objectified and are in denial of the situation. They end up completely blaming themselves for overreacting and being in the situation instead of sharing with others their discomfort or resentment towards their White partners. Certain women feel that the term, "Asian woman" was imposed upon them by White men, and some had experienced an explicitly sexualized gaze on their body as "Asian." (Nemoto 2006, p. 31). In Sue's research, she found that nearly all members of her focus groups interpreted these microaggressions as indicating that Asian women are only needed for the physical needs of White men and nothing more (2017). Racial microaggressions are defined as subtle forms of racial bias and discrimination experienced by members of marginalized groups" (Dovidio 1996, p. 51). East Asian women are having to deal with these racial microaggressions within the United States constantly which impact how they form relationships in society.

Methods

I interviewed American born East Asian women and White American men in relationships. This means the East Asian women would be at least of second-generation American or later. I interviewed people, over the age of 18, who had been in long-term heterogenous relationships for at least a year or longer.

I recruited participants by using snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is a method of gathering research subjects through an initial contact who refers you to another contact, and eventually, the web of contacts expands. I understand that there are limits to this research method as the range of contacts will not be as wide. Nevertheless, my points of entry were my family and friends and three organizations, the East Coast Asian American Student Union, the Organization of Chinese Americans, and the Asian American Student Association at Bard College.

My first point of entry was my parents. They both have grown up mostly in the United States. My mom was born in New York while my dad migrated to the United States at a very young age at around nine years old. Both of my parents are East Asian and have a large network of East Asian American friends like themselves. They agreed to put me in contact with interracial couples. Subsequently, those couples I interview put me in contact with others. In addition, my mother's sister, who is personally in an interracial marriage herself, fits into this project well as she also was born in the United States and put me in contact with other couples similar to her. Lastly, I have grown up with people who are in these relationships and I reached out through forms of social media to ask to interview them and refer me to other subjects to interview.

My second point of entry was organization based within college campuses. I first got in

contact with these organizations to ask if they could help advertise my project, by email. Then once I got in contact with a few couples, they all helped refer me to more couples. I also reached out to Bard's Asian American Student Association. I emailed and posted in the Facebook group about my senior project and monitored the responses to see if people were willing to participate or refer me to people who are willing to help.

Before I conducted my interviews, I anticipated difficulties that I could and could not predict. I worried about running into problems of people not wanting to be interviewed as there are no benefits whatsoever for them. This meant I had to work extra hard to find as many couples as I could and hope there would be willing people to volunteer to be interviewed. I also anticipated relationship tensions that could arise within a respondent. If this situation arised, I would let them come to their conclusion unless it became a bigger issue. In that case, I would end the interview. Throughout all of my interviews, I had no issues with these difficulties I prepared for. I was able to find nine individuals to conduct in-depth interviews with.

In the following chapters, I explore various topics that are most impactful to my respondents. In Chapter 2, I explore the conundrum between these East Asian women and their families when faced with their interracial relationships. Chapter 3 discusses how the couple navigates and handles the cultural differences between the two. Lastly, Chapter 4 hits topics such as gender and its effects on how my respondents view their partners as well as how they choose their partners. Ultimately, this paper aims for a better understanding of the inner workings of the relationships between East Asian American women and White American men.

Respondent Information

<u>Respondent's Name</u>	<u>Race</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Partner's Name</u>
Sarah Lee	Chinese	25	Raymond Williams
Barbara Ng	Burmese	21	Jack Winnings
Tina Su	Burmese	24	Andrew Timmins
Mindy Siu	Chinese	49	Nathan Rogers
Andrea Cheng	Taiwanese	21	David Hopper
Melody Sheng	Chinese	22	Michael Wells
Sophie Yu	Vietnamese	23	Victor Smith
Shirley Meng	Korean	22	Ryan Reeves
Wendy Kim	Korean	27	Lucas Colby

Chapter 2: Family and the Relationship

One of the most common observations that came from my interviews was the importance of family within these East Asian women's lives. This chapter explores how family impacts this specific relationship between East Asian American women and White American men as well as the impact the relationship has on the women's family. I will be addressing the questions, how does family and the interracial relationship affect each other? Maintaining good values, gaining approval, showing respect to the family were crucial factors for these women. These East Asian American women grew up with the tradition of following specific rules, which became ingrained in their lives that come about from family.

East Asian women have grown up within American society, yet are immigrants from East Asia. It is important to distinguish between race and ethnicity as they oftentimes get confused. Race normally refers to a person's physical appearance taking into account their skin, hair, or eye color. Ethnicity refers to cultural factors, including nationality, regional culture, and language. Therefore these women's race is East Asian, yet they have both an American and East Asian ethnicity.

My participants grew up with their parents as their main influencers. The parents impacted how my respondents viewed other people, influencing both consciously and subconsciously whom they will and will not date. Some respondents describe their parents as more strict than others in East Asian women's families. Specific to each family, parents raise their children differently. Particularly, within the East Asian family living in America, certain traditions and norms are followed within an Asian American household. Through my interviews, I found that there are pressures on these women to date a specific man. For the White American

man growing up can be similar, yet very different, depending on what traditions, habits, and culture their parents emphasized.

Expressly for these East Asian American women, their families have been in the United States now for two generations or more. The length of their time living in the United States causes more of a distinction between those who are East Asian and East Asian American. East Asian Americans are those who are East Asians individuals with American citizenship and were born in the United States. These individuals have gradually become more Americanized, as the majority of the population they are surrounded by is American.

This term “Americanized” means how immigrant families have adjusted to American ways and norms within American culture. These changes and adjustments have allowed these families to become more accepted by other American individuals. José Itzigsohn believes that incorporation and transnationalism are important here. He believes, “transnational practices that recreate a sense of community are based on cultural understandings of belonging and mutual obligation. He states that although there are transnational practices occurring, this does not mean incorporation is not taking place” (Itzigsohn 2002, p. 770). These East Asian women in my studies have transnational practices tying them back to their cultural traditions; meanwhile, through interracial relationships, they are incorporating themselves within American society as well. I want to explore how incorporation through Americanization impacts their relationships with their partners and their family; as well as what difficulties these women have as a result.

Pressures from East Asian Families

Across the majority of the interviews with women in East Asian households, I find their families prefer their daughters to marry a man of the same race. According to Matthew Clair, he refers to “race” as generally understood among social scientists as a social construct. “Although biologically meaningless when applied to humans— physical differences such as skin color have no natural association with group differences in ability or behavior—race nevertheless has tremendous significance in structuring social reality.” (Clair 2015, p. 1). All things considered, dating one of their own race is not always possible; therefore they expect first a man of the same race or second a White American man who is successful and has good values. Ultimately, the success and ethical values are critical to find in a partner. From my research, East Asian families would instead prefer their daughters marry within their race, yet will settle for them to be with a White American man without clamor.

The pressure to be able to attract a husband growing up as an East Asian woman is immense as well. These women are groomed by their parents in a certain way that puts their appearance first. Rosalind S. Chou writes about how growing up, her mother constantly policed her body. She states “I was directed to put my body in specific types of clothing and maintain a certain level of personal hygiene so that I could appeal to the opposite sex. My mother’s policing was heteronormative, reifying “compulsory heterosexuality” (Chou 2015, p. 31). The family pressure to find a husband in the first place plays a huge role in the socialization of East Asian women into American society.

As these East Asian American women are of the second generation or later, they have acquired a considerable amount of American culture since they were born in the United States.

Their family values and American culture is what they have maintained and known for so long through their childhood. Within these respondent's family are values and ways of living that for over generations they have followed. Meanwhile, living in the United States impacts these ways of living as the need to fit in and merge into the norms become important, especially to younger individuals who are attending school with other American students.

Hence, acquiring American culture often leads to losing some of their East Asian culture as these cultures often collide in values. For those of the second generation in America, marrying a full East Asian who is a first-generation immigrant becomes less likely than marrying a White American man. These women are able to step up on the social ladder by becoming more Americanized and learning the cultural norms. While these women are learning and becoming more associated with American culture, East Asian American women will start having more in common with White American men.

For example, Sophie knew Vietnamese but when she started going to Pre-k and kindergarten she started only learning English and kind of broke away from Vietnamese. The Vietnamese kids picked up on it and she remembers how that was why the Vietnamese kids did not like her. She was starting to learn a different language part of a different culture so she did not fit in with all the other Vietnamese kids. Sophie, as an Americanized Vietnamese individual, feels a tension between her two identities, American and Vietnamese. She does not fit in if she starts learning English and using it more, though if she were to speak Vietnamese in an English only environment the same would happen and she would be left out. Therefore, when attending school she learned that in order to be accepted she had to fit in and do what everyone else was doing.

From my interviews, I found that East Asian families are, for the most part, quite open with their daughters having a White American boyfriend or husband. In the past, there has been tension in East Asian families to strictly marry certain people. There have been rigid rules for women in East Asian families where “women are granted little decision-making power and are not expected an individual identity apart from their family role, which emphasizes their service to their male counterparts. A woman who violates her role in her partnership brings shame to herself and her family (Pyke 2003, p. 38). Confucian family values have always been important as is the concept of "guilting the children" so they marry someone of their race. Furthermore, parents try to persuade their daughters to date certain men. Then if the marriage fails, the woman is almost always blamed and shamed as the one who was not supportive enough or a good enough of a wife towards her husband in traditional Asian culture. My research in conversation with this shows that although there are still hints of these family values within the stricter East Asian parents, they are not strong enough to ultimately change their daughter's mind about who they date.

Open (Parents who are Indifferent)

It is essential to look at the types of parents who are accepting and utterly open to their daughters dating White American men as these parents move away from East Asian traditions. This parenting stance is completely different from the traditional East Asian culture. The fact that they open up themselves and their families to America as a society and accepting intermarriage shows how these families have changed and have become more open-minded. As

stated earlier, East Asian women have traditionally been more dependent and more controlled in terms of whom they marry so with families being accepting it shows how they are moving away from East Asian culture. Miscegenation also allows the possibility of fully assimilating into American culture. As East Asians are trying to gain equality within the United States, they gain an entirely new culture and ultimately look for a partner who is White American in order to fully assimilate into American society. On all accounts, these women I have interviewed are partnering with a White American man for many different reasons. This partnership shows that there is enough acceptance from both parties towards the other even if they are both of a different race.

The women I interviewed had families who were very open about them dating a White American man. These women include Barbara Ng, Shirley Meng, Wendy Kim, Melody Sheng, and Sarah Lee. All of their parents did not mind who they dated. What seemed more important to these individual's parents was their happiness and that the man was supportive. The majority of these women, not including Shirley, had dated a majority of White American guys in their history of dating. There arises a pattern which shows that East Asian women are morphing from their old perspective to a new perspective. The East Asian American women I interviewed have dated two races; a man of their race or a White American man.

In Barbara's situation, her parents did not seem to care who she dated. Barbara is a 21-year-old, Burmese-American individual who had been dating her boyfriend, Jack Winnings, for two and a half years. Barbara's parents were very open to her dating Jack. Her mom had dated White guys before marrying her dad, who is Burmese but grew up in the United States. Barbara did not have any pressure to date a specific guy. Her mom had nonchalantly said to her,

“as long as he’s not a serial killer or a criminal, I’ll respect anyone you date!” In her dad’s case, he sees her as still the baby of the family. He does not want her dating anybody at all, and Barbara says he has to accept it. Barbara chose to date a White American man even though her father disapproves of it which shows that Barbara is entirely in control of whom she chooses to ultimately be with. For Barbara, race does not seem to be an issue at all for her parents because they had also dated outside of their race themselves. These type of parents represent East Asian parents who are completely Americanized and have very little remeninsce of traditional East Asian culture for marriage.

Parents Who Care, But Not About Race

Wendy Kim’s boyfriend Lucas Colby met her divorced parents. For the most part, they tried to figure out who the man was and what he was like as a person. It was more important for her parents to know that he would support her and make her happy. She says, “I guess they were kind of just feeling it out and seeing where everything stands. Everything’s good now. It wasn’t any fights or anything it was kind of more just like taking temperatures of the water and cautious. Like this is a good thing and he’s going to take care of you like how you’d expect any parents to be when they notice their daughter is about to marry someone.” From her response, there was less relating to race and ethnicity as it did not seem to be an issue whatsoever to her family. Similar to Barbara, Wendy’s parents care about her happiness; however they find that there are certain paths that Wendy needs to follow to lead her to happiness.

Coming from a divorced family, Wendy states that the only pressure she had was from her mom to not date someone that was like her dad. “So she would always remind me not to date

anybody like my dad because she's just like, "women tend to date men that are just like their fathers and you don't want to do that." But I take that with a grain of salt because I like my dad. So that was kind of a pressure and I didn't have any pressures from my dad because he always knew I'd make the right decisions and he knew that I'm not like a doormat or anything. I stand up for what I want and know what I want out of relationships and my feelings. So he was not worried about me." Coming from a traditional East Asian point of view, her mother wanted her to date someone respectful to Wendy instead of having someone like her husband walk all over her and drag her down. Digging deeper into this, in East Asian culture women tend to be more subordinate than men, and Wendy's mother did not want this to happen for her and did not want her daughter to have to go through a divorce as well.

For Sarah Lu who had been dating her boyfriend for seven years now, her parents were like "Ai ya Italian, you know what the stereotypes are. Like they're passionate, and may not be trustworthy" They were not hesitant really, it was just a first impression by race. They were ultimately very open minded to meeting him and for their daughter Sarah to date him. There are these stereotypes that cause uneasiness for parents, but once they meet these men these specific parents easily are able to get over those negative stereotypes.

Education and Success: Pressures for a Partner

There were other types of pressures that were more significant but did not necessarily involve race. These types of pressures were more focused on education and success. These beliefs about education and success derive from ethnicity and beliefs within their culture, so they are all intersectional. Certain East Asian American parents have expectations for their children to

marry a specific type of guy who embodies certain characteristics, not necessarily specific to their race. Here I am using intersectionality as it refers to the interconnected nature of social categories such as race, class, and gender. These social categories are continually overlapping and in discussion with interracial relationships.

For example, Shirley Meng, a Korean-American who is 21 and has dated her boyfriend, Ryan Reeves, for over a year stated that she had to date a man who was successful and who was well educated. She expressed “if I dated a burnout I’d probably get killed by my family. My family just has the expectation of not dating a ‘goob’ like a ‘goober’, someone who can’t articulate, someone who isn’t intellectual, someone who isn’t going anywhere in life like if I dated someone who was useless they’d be so mad at me even if I was happy. I don’t think my dad would approve of the marriage.” For Shirley, there was the expectation to date men who were educated, driven, and who could ultimately provide and support her. By her parents refusing her to date a ‘goober,’ they envision a man who will become successful and is intelligent. This vision causes her parents to be decently judgemental when meeting her boyfriends.

Shirley, as a result, was hesitant for her family to meet her boyfriend as she stated that they are quick to judge and become very invested in her relationships. The emphasis of judgment comes because she is the youngest sibling and the baby of the family. It is fascinating to look at her family's expectations of her and then the type of guys she chooses to date knowing these expectations. Shirley stated that she has only dated White and East Asian men in the past. Her parents wanted her to date someone from a “high class” yet this individual is either East Asian or White American. One cannot miss the overlapping of class and race. She feels as if these types

of individuals are what her family would accept as she is very aware of how her family feels towards her partners. Those men who self-identify under the race category of East Asian and White American seem to be the partners she finds acceptable for her family to meet as they, for her, are associated with success.

These parents clearly express what they want for their children. This affects how their children choose their partners and this expectation becomes the norm. It is essential that their partners are a good fit and that they can see a future together. These expectations have to do with filial piety as it plays a significant role because family is vital to East Asian women. For Melody Sheng, she had only dated Chinese and White American men in the past before Michael. She is a Chinese-American 22-year-old woman who attends Princeton University and started dating Michael Wells over two years ago. Melody's mother had questions about Michael at first wondering, "does he know Chinese?" Luckily Michael had learned Chinese after meeting Melody while they were still just friends at first. Furthermore communicating with her family was not considered an issue. For Melody's mother, the importance of communicating with her daughter's boyfriend was just one of her expectations that Melody needed to follow.

While Melody and her parents were fishing in 2018, they had a conversation where her parents just wanted to make sure that there were not any familial conflicts. They never wanted her to break up with Michael and date a Chinese guy because Melody was explicit when she expressed, "this guy makes me happy, and he's smart. And he's nice, and he comes from a very good education and is intellectual. So stuff that parents want to hear what they hear about a boyfriend." She ensured them that she was happy and cared about this guy who was a smart, intellectual guy." Melody needed to clearly explain that the man she was dating was a guy who

was intellectual in order to make it okay for her to date him. Explaining to her family that Michael was good enough was necessary, otherwise they may have told Melody that she should not date him.

Melody's family is more strict and specific in whom she can and cannot date. Her family does not like Koreans or Japanese or people from Hong Kong or Taiwan. Melody is very understanding of this as her family has specific reasons that she empathizes with well. She states, "My Mom's side of the family, like my grandparents' parents' were both killed by the Japanese, but they still hold a grudge from sixty years ago." Melody continued to speak in depth about Koreans as well about how she perceived them as having this very alpha male syndrome where they need to control everything. She states that her mother does not want someone like that for her who is going to control her life. She wants someone who lets her do what she wants and lets her be who she wants to be. That is why her mother did not want her to date a Korean guy. However, she also emphasized that she is not at all attracted to them either so the idea is not even tempting to her.

She explains how it is nothing personal against Korean men and that Korean culture has explicitly a vast number of expectations for what they believe is ideal for a family. Melody says she feels like it is not precisely the Korean individual who is the issue she says that it is a matter of family where mothers are always very controlling and have a massive amount of expectations for the girlfriend to do things for their sons. She says, "I just think that translates into the guy also controlling their girlfriends and because, I guess, part of it is because of filial piety that they don't, you know, disagree with their mothers and don't really fight with your girlfriends per se. Like if the mother says she doesn't like a girl because she doesn't do A, B and C for you and then

the guy won't defend their girlfriends and that's just so not attractive to me that like you will listen to your mother to that extent." Melody expresses that even though filial piety, the respect of parents, elders, and ancestors, is important to her, it seems that within the Korean culture, filial piety becomes too much and too intense. She says, "the boy will constantly be in conflict with a girl he loves and a mother he loves." Melody knows that having that tension would be extremely problematic for her and her family. She voices that she thinks dating a Korean feels like dating his whole family which she does not want at all.

Melody's family has these assumptions about the types of people Koreans are and this has affected her opinions about them as well. Therefore for Melody, White or Chinese men have been the only two options for her to consider dating as she believes they are less intense. Specifically for Melody, her family wants her to be in a relationship with someone who is not any East Asian individual, but specifically a man who is Chinese or a White American man who has the capability of success.

Gender & Race

Some East Asian parents ultimately accepted their daughters dating White American men; however, their experiences were different from the parents who were completely open to their daughters dating White American men. The difference between families is essential to look at as there is intersectionality here where gender and race are completely intermingling.

In Andrea Cheng's experience as a Chinese American, her parents were not actively against her dating David Hopper, a White American guy. She stated that her father had thought she was a lesbian for a long time and had felt almost relief that at least his daughter was not gay

and so it was more okay that she started dating a White guy as long as whom she was dating was a man and it was a heterosexual relationship. When I asked her if her parents were surprised when she first started dating a White guy she stated,

“My dad would sometimes joke about me dating an Asian guy, but I don't think my dad was that surprised. Honestly, for the longest time, my dad thought I was a lesbian just because I didn't date in High School at all so he was kind of worried. And the only time I showed any interest in guys was when I was watching a TV show and they were both White guys, like the main characters. it was just really subtle things like I would wear plaid or flannels and he would just be like “I don't know if you should wear that because you look like a lesbian”. It sounds really bad but just stuff like that.”... “It was more of a relief when I starting dating someone.” (Andrea, 21).

Andrea grew up with the pressure to date a Taiwanese guy. However, her father became nervous thinking that she could possibly be a lesbian. Therefore, he was able to accept when she started dating her boyfriend even if he was White. Andrea dating a White guy was the better option for her than possibly being lesbian. To her father, being a lesbian was less acceptable than dating a White American man.

She continues commenting on her father's expectations when it comes to what kind of guy she should date. Before Andrea went to college she remembers her father telling her that there are a couple of races that he would not recommend her to date. She says, “essentially he wanted me to date a Taiwanese guy, and I was like 'Well what about White guys?' because he didn't say anything about that and he stated 'I guess, I mean I wouldn't be surprised if you started dating a White guy, to be honest' so I was like oh okay.” Based on how Andrea grew up, her father could tell that she was more attracted to White guys; thus he was less surprised when she

discussed if it was okay for her to date someone of the White American background. To her father, it was as if he had to choose between her being a lesbian and dating women of the same sex or dating a White American male. Her father would effortely choose the man.

In this case, dating the same gender and dating one of another race is put in a hierarchy where deviating from cultural norms for gender becomes more unacceptable than deviating from their traditional cultural norms. This situation puts the two consistently overlapping social categories of race and gender into perspective. Why one would choose a man over her daughter being queer was at question. It seems that straying from the social norm of being lesbian was farther from the norm than dating a man of another race.

Parents Against Relationship

The importance of success for the woman's partner becomes a common theme amongst these women. There are certain parents who believe, as long as the participants have a boyfriend who will be successful they do not care if their daughter dates a White American man. However, there are still other families who are entirely against a relationship with White American men. Certain reasoning becomes based on other factors that are not always about race; though they are all intersectional.

For Sophie Yu who is Vietnamese, her parents were not the ones who were strict, it was her aunt who expressed strong feelings of her not dating a White guy. Sophie's mother was completely okay with it, and the only restriction for Sophie was that she could not have a boyfriend until her sophomore year of college. However, when her aunt, who is also her godmother, met Victor Smith, she was strict and entirely against the relationship. Sophie

remembers her aunt as having always been strict. She gives some background information about her aunt who is an accountant and who married a doctor from Vietnam. Sophie describes what happened when her aunt met Victor, “she just badgered him with questions like, so what are your intentions with Sophie, do you want to marry her? What do you want to do as a career? How are you gonna support yourself with that? What do your parents do? How many siblings do you have, what are they going to be doing?” Right before the second time her aunt met him she was like ‘oh you're still with him?’ a year later. She goes, you know teachers don’t make a lot of money? Her aunt then directs the questions to Sophie asking, where do you think this is going? Do you think he’ll be a good father or husband like can he support you?” Sophie's aunt also has said, “If this does not work out I have a doctor who’s Vietnamese I can set you up with.” The issue her aunt had was both that Victor is White and that he is pursuing a career that is not up to her standards. Again, it is about both race and class where she also emphasized that he is not a Vietnamese man of her own race and he is not going to be able to support her.

Sophie has her own personal reasons for feeling uncomfortable choosing a man who is Vietnamese. She believes if she dated a Vietnamese guy it would probably be fine but feels there are unappealing expectations for a Vietnamese couple. These expectations consist of how one will raise your kids, speaking to your kids in Vietnamese, the wedding where they have to wear their Ao Dai’s which is a Vietnamese garment worn by both partners but nowadays worn mostly by the woman. She states that she was “kind of put off by that.” She dislikes how if she were to choose a Vietnamese man she would have to conform to all the Vietnamese traditions. Therefore, Sophie is more comfortable with dating someone who is White American because she can choose her own way of living free from the strict Vietnamese traditions. She is able to still

communicate well with a White American individual as well as decide how she would raise her own family free from any family obligation. Sophie was put off by her own culture which was a reason for her to date one of a different race. She did not like the rigid rules and ways that she felt she may be forced to abide by if she dated someone who was Vietnamese.

There were many East Asian women I interviewed whose families who were much stricter in whom they should and should not be within a relationship. Parents were quite controlling in who their daughters date where some were unaccepting of this interracial relationship of East Asian and White American. This belief came from how East Asians and White Americans were too different that it just would not work out as the two races were too distinctively different in the morals and values they both held. In Mindy Siu's case, "they did not think it was a good idea, especially for the girls, to marry caucasian men. They felt that there was a moral issue with that. This moral issue was because they thought they were not as moral people as their own people. It is a terrible thing to say but it's true that my parents thought it would ultimately end up in divorce or the person being unfaithful." Mindy emphasizes values and morals as a considerable factor regarding race as the two races were supposedly too different to be able to get along. Mindy is now married to her husband, Nathan, for the length of ten years; but they dated for four to five years before they decided to tie the knot. It was necessary for them to date for a long time before getting married to ensure they would not get divorced in the future.

Unaccepting of Black Men

It seems even though the East Asian women's families I interviewed are quite open, they can likewise be very close-minded in certain ways regarding dating Black American men.

Melody shows a clear divide stating, “They don't want me to date a Black guy, but I think that's just because a lot of Chinese don't accept that.” She goes on to discuss a friend she had who was Black and how her parents reacted to it. She states one really closest friends her freshman year was Black and her parents would see photos on wechat and on other social media. Her mom would text her wondering why she was so close to him. Melody would respondnd telling her that he was her really good friend. Her mom would be like, “okay, stay like that.” Melody says, “So I think other than, you know, like, like having a Black boyfriend is strictly forbidden. Chinese, White, they were fine with it.” Melody’s mom clearly did not want Melody dating her friend who was Black.

For Sarah and Barbara Ng, they were both told that they should not date a Black guy. However, this was just a rule that was never questioned or given much thought to why this was how it was. The perception of Blacks from the East Asian American point of view is full of stereotypes and prejudices which are negative. There is a real racial component because of the connections between stereotypes and racism. Also, the connection of values and norms within these stereotypes leads to how the perception of White men can be both good and bad, yet the perception of Black men cannot be good. These perceptions are entirely about the stereotypes and prejudices assigned to certain people. For interracial relationships, this is impactful because there is tension already when these East Asian American women date White men, but there would be an even higher tension if they chose to date a man of the Black race.

A considerable number of those interviewed have parents who were open-minded about dating outside of their race to a White American man. Being open-minded about dating a White American man does not necessarily mean that their parents were open to them dating other races

also. The distinction is fascinating to look at as one's family stereotypes of other races based on their own experiences and beliefs impact whom they want their child to date and marry.

Frank D. Bean, Jennifer Lee & James D. Bachmeier describe a new binary color line where there is "a Black/nonBlack divide – highlighting the persistent and uniquely strong separation of Blacks, not only from Whites but also from other non-White ethnoracial groups." For example, "the Mississippi Chinese rejected their fellow ethnics who married Blacks as well as any multiracial children they bore" (2013, p. 129). This divide is shown amongst my respondents where their parents have an issue with their daughters dating a Black individual yet can accept their daughters dating a White individual.

The East Asian women's family seems to be less strict than the White American men's as the women's parents seem to be more open-minded about dating outside one's race, especially with a White man. It seems that their parents see that if one marries outside of the East Asian population, it would be to a White man. At least one other family member has also dated a White American man. There seems to be a considerable amount of prejudice towards dating a Black individual from the discussions of the women's parents. There was no explanation to this that any of the women could give, yet it seems this trend of not accepting their daughters dating a Black individual is part of the pressures of East Asian parents when their child chooses a partner.

The pressures of East Asian parents in choosing a partner goes in line with how every parent wants their child to date someone who ultimately is a "good person." The definition of a "good person" comes down to what values are essential within a family usually derived from the parents. East Asian American women comment on why they decide to date a White American

man. Certain women I interviewed state that it is usually the men's families that are more hesitant and wary of them dating East Asian women. Hesitancy seems to be because the White American families are not aware of what Asian culture is like whatsoever, so they do not know what to expect. It comes down to, in a few cases, White American men's families not being aware of the culture of the East Asian girlfriend/wife. The feeling of hesitation and uncertainty is prevalent on the man's side of the family.

Uncertainty from White American Parents

In Barbara Ng's case, she had been dating her boyfriend for about two years. She had met her boyfriend's parents already which was not a big deal. They were accepting of her as she was very Americanised in the first place. Barbara stated that her parents also "did not care. Nobody cared" when she told them that she started dating Jack. The real hesitation came when his grandmother came into the picture.

Jack was specific about how he did not want her to meet one of his grandmas because Jack knew this grandma would not accept Barbara. Jack said that his grandma has been rude to one family member who tried to introduce their partner to his grandma in the past. Jack said to her "I don't really want you to meet this grandma because she doesn't understand what it's like to be in an interracial relationship"... "Apparently that's happened before in their family when his aunt or uncle brought in an Asian partner, and his grandma was so rude about it." He did not explain why. Nonetheless, the situation shows the complete rejection of this interracial relationship where Jack's grandma was completely unaccepting of him dating an individual of the East Asian race.

In another interview with Andrea Cheng, the boyfriend's mother stated that she did not mind that David was dating Andrea though there was apparent hesitancy observed there. David's mother was nervous in meeting Andrea as his mother specifically asked David things like, "oh will she be comfortable with hugging?" and was just in general unsure about the cultural differences. However, she was not completely closed off to meeting Andrea, just a little nervous about it and felt that connecting to each other would be difficult. In almost all the interviews I had, they were mostly similar to this scenario where the boyfriend's family was a little uneasy about the meeting.

Impacts

Some pressures come from family as they want what is best in their eyes for their children. With the Eastern Asian American families, there is a mix of traditional and new culture beliefs, meaning a mix of Eastern and Western beliefs at play in their lives. That seems to fit into these women's relationships as these women are very Americanised, yet have values that are traditional East Asian. Even though these women are East Asian individuals living in America, the second they arrived a change in their ways was necessary.

These East Asian American women responded to the mix of the two cultures they have grown up in with both an Asian household and an American environment. For Shirley, she states from all of this that her family raised her to be very independent. When Ryan sees her holding too many things, he wants to help her and if she says no, he feels a little demasculinized. As Shirley was raised to be more independent, she goes against many gender norms for women. This independence, in turn, causes her boyfriend Ryan to feel more insecure and feels the need to

make up for his masculinity. Shirley was raised like this because divorced parents raised her. She compares her childhood to how her boyfriend was raised stating, "Because I was raised by a strong woman, I feel the need to also be a strong woman. Versus he was raised, not to diss his mother or anything, but he was raised by a woman who was a little weaker and is definitely supported by their father that he feels like he needs to support me in every way. Versus I don't want to be supported in every way." Shirley's childhood was a more atypical household with gender norms not being entirely prevalent. In contrast, Ryan had a stereotypical household where his father is the breadwinner who goes to work, and his mother is a stay at home mom who is more dependent on his father.

From my research, East Asian women are growing up in households that consist of old and new ways and is continually changing because of the American environment they are in now. With family, pressures bring ways of life that they are already used to which are not usually wholly in line with exactly what their daughter wants. Even though there are contrasting opinions from daughter versus family, this still does not get in the way of these respondents decision in choosing to date White American men. Ultimately the majority of these East Asian parents did not care about the racial aspect of marrying a White American man, they cared that this man was one who was well educated and destined for success. Even when there are family members who are completely against the relationship, these East Asian women still remain with their partners.

Chapter 3: Navigating An Interracial Relationship

In an interracial relationship, these couples have to do a great amount of learning and adjusting. This chapter goes through what these adjustments consist of and how the couple worked through them. The question in this chapter is how does the couple handle the two different races and the cultural differences that go along with them? Throughout all the interviews with these women, all of their partners were open to cultural differences and were accepting of East Asian culture. There were no deal-breaking issues that would get in the way on the topic of cultural differences. These couples have arguments typically over communication and their schedules. However, there are some things that certain women notice when introducing their partners to their culture.

Specific women became shy and nervous in sharing and occasionally felt like even hiding their cultural differences. Ultimately what nearly all of the women had most to say about cultural differences was about family, mannerism, and food. When researching this, I became acutely aware of the fact that these men had little knowledge previously about East Asian culture. At the same time, women feel that their partners do not fully understand their culture and then end up putting less effort into trying to share their culture. East Asian women are becoming more and more Americanized and as much as they try to hold onto their old culture, my respondents end up believing that the cultural differences become less critical.

Comparing these women to first generation East Asians families, first-generation individuals who have first arrived in the United States have a completely different way of living life where they dress differently, speak differently, and have different values. People are not used to and do not like different people who have different norms; it makes them uncomfortable.

Steven Spitzer explains, “If we assume that class societies are based on fundamental conflicts between groups, and that harmony is achieved through the dominance of a specific class, it makes sense to argue that deviants are culled from groups who create specific problems for those who rule” (p. 640). Hence, those who are different from the dominant groups become less accepted within society.

These individuals are breaking social norms within the United States to act and be a certain way; thus they are less accepted by other people. Being less accepted by other people based on their culture is called racism, where a particular culture is below another. Ruth Benedict defines racism as “the dogma that one ethnic group is condemned by nature to congenital inferiority and another group is destined for congenital superiority (1997, p. 87). Therefore when East Asians have been in the United States for longer, they start to understand that in order to gain respect and equality they must conform to the cultural norms within American society.

Sharing Own Culture: Importance of Food

It is imperative for men to have an open mind about eating foods outside of Western foods. At the same time, it is uncomfortable to East Asians if White Americans are outlandish about how unfamiliar the food is. Shirley describes when she first showed Ryan’s parents what Korean barbeque is. She had cooked for them, and when they tried it, they were amazed in an “out of this world” way. They loved the food but they seemed to love it excessively. Shirley states, “ I shared my Asian culture with Ryan and his family. It seemed very... exotic to them.” She said the word very hesitantly because she really dislikes the word but it related to the situation because of their reaction to the food where it seemed very strange to them. “When I

made them Korean BBQ they were like ‘Oh my god this is an amazing thing! This is so wild!’ and I was like it’s just beef.” Ryan’s parents were completely shocked by such foreign prepared food. Shirley found their reaction of extreme shock to the food strange. She felt exoticized even though Ryan’s parents had no intention of making her feel that way. From this uncomfortable situation leads to situations where these women feel like they hold back from sharing certain things. Shirley admitted that she sees herself as very American and does hide her Asian past at times in fear of her culture being “exoticized” as she calls it. As much as she wants to share her culture, at the same time she does not want people gawking and acting like how she grew up is extremely far fetched. It can be very disheartening as she personally does not see how her family and her boyfriend’s family are that different.

Shirley’s boyfriend Ryan has also never traveled outside of the United States and does not possess a passport. She emphasizes that she feels like she needs to open him up to many things as she loves to travel often. She states, “I definitely feel like it is my job to educate him as well because I know he won’t educate himself on my culture at all like everything he knows about my culture is going to be coming from me.” Her boyfriend Ryan would not educate himself on her culture on his own. Ryan would not have known about any aspect of Korean culture if not for Shirley. He also would not have eaten and even tried as much East Asian foods if it were not for Shirley. Ryan used to be extremely hesitant to try certain foods, therefore, Shirley “needed to almost coach Ryan into eating more variety of foods.” These two individuals are very different as one loves to travel and always eat different types of food while the other never travels and keeps to one type of food.

Wendy also expresses how she needs to find a partner who is willing to try all different kinds of food. Her mother holds certain expectations when guests come over for food. Wendy's mother expects her guests to always eat her food no matter what. Her mother insists if someone is not a good eater or a picky eater it is disrespectful; she does not trust people who do not eat when they are at other people's homes when they are offered food. It was then necessary for Wendy to inform Lucas about always eating the food her mother cooks them. Wendy states, "I told Lucas if my mom gives you food you pretty much say thank you, and you eat it." One will eat food when others cook it because one wants to be respectful.

It reminds Wendy of another experience during Thanksgiving. She explains how even though she went to a vegan Thanksgiving she would never refuse to eat vegan food because that would be extremely rude. In addition, Wendy articulates that even if she was vegetarian or vegan and she went to someone's house where their parents fed her meat, she would probably still eat it. She emphasizes, "It's me respecting them and their hospitality and them opening up their home." That is why it is also important to help clean up after someone makes you a home cooked meal at their place. Wendy told Lucas that he has to help cook and clean or at least offer to because it goes a really far way. She also believes it is really humbling if she sees a stranger come and help with the house. It is very important to respect the home and the parents when you are a guest in their home and they are offering their hospitality to you.

In another scenario regarding differences with food, Mindy states that after she started dating her husband Nathan, adjustment had to occur. She states that the food they consume can be different because she grew up mostly only eating Chinese and East Asian foods. After meeting Nathan she started eating and cooking more Western food. At this point in her marriage,

they cook half Asian food and half American food. But in the beginning, she used to make more Asian food. They both are luckily open to both types of cuisine as their lifestyles have shifted after being together. Marriage between Mindy and Nathan, with an interracial relationship, fuses the two cultures completely here with the exemplification of food, changing both of their ways of life.

Melody states that in comparison to her boyfriend she feels “super Chinese” where she prefers hot water over cold. Melody has always grown up drinking hot water or hot tea while her boyfriend believes that water tastes best ice cold. Meanwhile her boyfriend Michael will miss his pizza and fries if they just cook Chinese food for a week. Therefore there are lifestyle choices in terms of food and eating that she believes can lead to conflicts.

Similarly, Sarah Lee has been dating her boyfriend Raymond for almost eight years. She believes the differences she has with her boyfriend are really minuscule. Continuing the topic of food, they share their culture with each other through cooking and methods of cooking. Sarah says that because he is Italian American, he used to salt his butter which she thought was very strange. Raymond taught her how to cook pasta, how to cook a proper sauce. He was already very open and interested in Asian food and likes spicy foods. Sarah is impressed at how he can take the heat at the same level as her. His family does have differences from hers. She says “For lunch, it's very light they do 150 grams of pasta or 100 grams and a small salad and evenings it's a protein salad or grilled veggies. The way they eat is different. Wine at lunch and dinner just a little bit. The way they cook is smaller. Unlike us where it's a feast every meal. The cultural differences bring us together.” These two both have the love for cooking but since they share different cultural backgrounds they cook differently and different cuisines which ultimately brings them closer together.

Similarly, Sophie also shares her difference with Victor in what they call certain foods. They both know of and are aware of the same foods but she says “I call everything noodles and he’s Italian-American so he calls everything pasta.” Their lingo differs in how they call certain foods. All of these differences are indeed minuscule showing that cultural differences may cause some conflicts. However, these conflicts are common and other couples who are not interracial couples likely experience similar conflicts merely based on differences anyhow. Within all of these relationships, there lifestyle differences that revolve around food. Nothing is deal-breaking and these individuals have been able to work through all of the differences. For this couple everything is a learning process.

Respect Your Elders

Along with food is a drinking culture that certain East Asian parents participate in. East Asian parents often expect their daughter’s boyfriends to drink with them. More specifically there is the culture of listening to one’s elders and doing what they say even when one does not want to. Filial piety and respecting one’s elders is the utmost important responsibility in East Asian culture to follow.

Andrea recalls a story about when her dad met her boyfriend over dinner out at a restaurant. For Asian families, a lot of times when the dad meets the boyfriend, he will drink with the dad, usually drinking wine. Andrea describes her boyfriend’s reaction saying, “I think he was really nervous and he had work the next day and my dad kept offering him a drink, and he kept turning it down. And I was just kind of sitting there like just take the fucking drink !... My dad is really laid back, but he eventually took the drink. But my dad understood he was just

really nervous.” Andrea’s father was okay with her boyfriend not taking the drink knowing that he was nervous, but insisted anyway. Her father both wanted to loosen David up since he was nervous and wanted David to listen to him and do what he says. Doing what her father said and taking what he offered was a significant cultural difference that David was not completely used to. David had to obey in order for him to leave a good impression on her father even if David did have work early the next day.

With respecting one's elders, Andrea describes an unspoken rule that may be interpreted as slightly controlling and strict. She states, “When elders walk into the room especially when you're eating and you're sitting down you are usually required to get up and greet them.” That is not the customary experience and traditions that Andrea experienced with American families. David was really good about the situation on his own when he met her father. When he met her parents he got out of his car both times to greet them which is seen in Asian culture as a person who has good manners. David already had been raised similarly where he was raised to be polite especially to people he was meeting for the first time. Therefore there was no issue with this when he met her parents. In this case, David had similar ways of addressing elders and also respected elders himself without needing to be told to do so. Not all individuals have this in mind when meeting their significant other's parents.

Andrea recalls a similar situation when her ex-boyfriend had met her father and the situation went entirely in the other direction. When Andrea’s dad walked in, her ex-boyfriend “was just sitting down at the table and just waved at him and was like “hey wassup?” And my dad was like “What the fuck?” He was like “What the fuck is wrong with this kid?” I was like, I’m so sorry.” For my American friends, they’re just like why would you stand up to greet

someone like that makes no sense. And my dad was just like “oh yeah it’s cultural differences so it’s ok.” He was a little taken aback, but he was not like offended or anything.” What is ironic here is the language used because even though her father expects someone to stand up and greet him, he in response uses some vulgar language to express his shock. This situation shows how East Asian parents expect respect given to them as they are older than Andrea and her boyfriend. Since her ex-boyfriend did not show respect by standing up and giving her father a handshake, her father was at first easily quick to judge him. I could see here also that her ex-boyfriend and American friends do not understand very much about Andrea’s culture because being polite to the parents is very important in East Asian culture.

When Sarah Lee and Raymond Williams are out for dinner with the parents, Raymond feels the need to keep up with Sarah’s father. They ultimately have a good time but Raymond feels slightly pressured as it is important to respect an elder who is pouring you another glass by accepting it. Sarah states, “my dad is the type of guy who loves wine with dinner or honestly wine with anything.” Therefore when her boyfriend joins their family for dinner he always will drink with her dad, never mind the consequences of a hangover the next day. Sarah continues, “I don’t think my dad would be offended if Raymond refused the drink, but I think he’d be both surprised and sad that he doesn’t have another drinking buddy.” Therefore being courteous and aware of what elders want becomes most important in this situation for Raymond. Raymond knows to always do what Sarah’s parents say because ultimately he is trying to make a good impression. Hence, in order to make a good impression, he has to please both of Sarah’s parents by accepting the drink. He must show respect and makes a good impression by doing so.

On another note, deriving from Eastern and Western ways of life, scheduling and planning differ between Sophie and Victor where Sophie's family is one way and Victor's is the complete opposite. Sophie's family is big on planning things in advance. Her mom, she says, is a little too eager where she likes to plan things like summer a year or more in advance. Sophie says, "Victor is not really like that, he sometimes gets kind of annoyed and frustrated at how early we plan things just because he's not good and doesn't really plan things and doesn't know what will happen." Because family is so important within East Asian culture, Sophie always discusses plans with her mother. She usually puts her mother first and feels obligated to as well. Sophie feels it is necessary to call her mom constantly to check up on future plans while Victor has a more laid back approach. Sophie and Victor nevertheless both agree on how important family is, values, are "similar in terms of family is pretty high up there in terms of values. For him, he's pretty Catholic so he has God, family, baseball, and I was on the list. For me, it's definitely family, jobs/careers in how much money I can make to support my family. He takes money less into account like he wants to be a baseball coach." There is the similarity of family being put first however, with Victor's family there is more room for discussion especially with things like scheduling.

The takeaways from this are that Sophie and Victor both think that family is the most important yet have different approaches in how they show it. Sophie's family expects her to do as they say and always be in touch and communicate, while Victor's family goes with the flow and in comparison is less intense than Sophie's. Constantly respecting their elders has an impact on the relationship indicating that Victor needs to adjust and learn how to get along with Sophie's

family as he has more obligations to always listen, do what they say, and start planning ahead.

This all becomes an adjustment for Victor once he and Sophie started dating.

Eastern vs. Western Culture

This next section will go further in depth on numerous differences and difficulties that East Asian women and White American men must discuss and encounter in their relationships within their families and their lifestyles. There are numerous differences that derive from Eastern and Western traditions including more on respecting elders, the role of the woman, and raising a child. I will also reveal how these women and men view each other's traditions.

The main difference Melody saw was how she and Michael treat their family. Melody has filial piety ingrained in her head with the amount of deference she needs to carry with her when she meets elders. Melody told Michael never to talk back to her mother and to just be nice and sweet because he needs to show respect. In contrast, when she met Michael's family she thought it was strange how Michael's parents treated him like a friend, as an equal, and someone who they can confide in. Michael's parents treat Melody the same way. It was something that was really different for her to experience but she says it was nice to experience something different. Michael does show respect for his family but in a different way which is less strict and more of a friend-based relationship. Respect is key in both families however, respect is shown in the East Asian culture as obedience and in the Western culture as equals. I could see it was more of a mother and father to daughter relationship rather than a friend to friend relationship which in turn leads to conflicts in each scenario. Honestly is less likely to come about in the parent to

child situation, nevertheless, disrespect is easier to occur in the Western family life. Both come with their advantages and disadvantages.

Other ideologies are different between the two cultures, one thing that Melody felt was different here in the United States was that there is “nothing wrong with a girl voicing her opinion. If anything it's incredibly attractive for a girl to be strong and independent and not need anyone else in their lives.” She enjoys the fact that she feels more like an equal with those in the United States especially with her White American boyfriend currently. She enjoys equality in a relationship because of her past Chinese boyfriends. They always expected her to just be nice and sweet to them because they paid for her meals and gave her fancy jewelry. Pretty much like the scenes you see in the movie “Crazy Rich Asians”. She describes that she felt like “a little caged bird” that was carried around as she felt she could never do what she wanted. Her past Chinese boyfriends felt like they owned Melody merely because they would pay or give her expensive gifts. They liked her as a dependent woman which completely objectifies her. Her past Chinese boyfriends would feel as if they were higher than her just because of the money aspect. Because of her experience in the past, she appreciates her independence and equality within her relationship with Michael.

From a similar yet different perspective as parents, Mindy Siu and Nathan Rogers have a daughter named Sarah and have difficulties navigating together in how to raise her. They have difficulties finding a balance between Eastern and Western ways of life where fully choosing one or the other is not an option. She states as her dilemma in choosing between Eastern and Western culture, “One is that you don't want her to be too eager to please and you know respectful of elders, whereas you want her to have her mind and to be someone independent so its a balance.

It's a little bit tough." She refers to the Eastern difference as to how parents raise their children, especially girls, to be very obedient and always be considerate to your elders.

Mindy states how she does not want her daughter to be too eager to please because she wants her daughter to have a voice and to be an outspoken individual which shows how Mindy is an Americanized Asian individual and holds a mix of beliefs as she wants a good balance of the two for her daughter Sarah. Mindy wants Sarah to be both respectful and courteous, but at the same time, not a pushover. She talks more about her husband Nathan and states, "In general, we agree on how important family is." Amongst the cultural difference, there are a lot of similarities that they have in common and family is an important factor for the two of them. A strong difficulty for the two of them is how to raise a family between their differing traditions. They both immensely respect one another's culture in how the cultures traditionally would raise a child but realizes that they want to raise their daughter taking from what is best from the two cultures.

In addition to balancing the two cultures, Mindy emphasizes how strange it is using Western medicine as she has grown up always using Chinese remedies for sickness or wounds. Regarding her health, she states that she was shocked when she came to the United States she would go to the doctor or ask friends for help, they would treat everything, every problem, with the use of drugs. Mindy says slightly uncomfortably, "I'm used to kind of just dealing with things homeopathically like chicken soup or lots of rest, eating lots of fruit to prevent colds. It's just the way I was raised and I'm not used to Advil and just taking something for anything." She does not understand how Americans have a drug or pill they can take for almost anything. The difference between herbal medicine and synthetic drugs is shown here in the contrast between her Chinese

culture and Raymond's Western American culture. She does not say which solution is better, she merely states that it was something she also needed to get used to.

Tina Su, 24 and Burmese-American, also realizes that a lot of the cultural differences have to do with the family. She uses the comparison of the stereotypical Asian household versus the American household. Again, the concept of filial piety for the family in the Asian household is something that from the American standpoint is really difficult for them to wrap their heads around. To the extent where even though we are in a modern era it still feels like Americans look upon Asian families as being in that stereotypical way always having to take care of your parents. Tina feels culturally obliged to see her family at Christmas. Whereas with her boyfriend Andrew Timmins, his parents are very free-spirited and individualistic. The cultural difference of feeling obliged to see family and to take care of family is ingrained within Tina. Though with Andrew he does not feel duty bound to see his family during holidays. They also have disagreements over everyday things like if Andrew doesn't want to do something that she wants to do. They have a difference in opinion at times as most couples do.

Similarly, Sarah and Raymond's values both include family as being very important and seeing them and talking to them often is extremely important. There are difficulties in the relationship for Sarah that include everyday things where Raymond will say, "Sarah pick up your clothes or you should at least try to ask and don't be timid." Sarah says she has grown up to always be shy and polite and confronting people about things is not something that comes naturally to her. Obeying as an East Asian woman has become ingrained in her, consequently living in American society and asking for what she wants is sometimes difficult for her. Sarah says, "I also tend to get frustrated with him with his feeling to always feel obligated to join

people in things like he won't say no like he always wants to make it work with people when they want to travel." In this regard, Sarah and Raymond both dislike telling people no which tends to come from how their parents raised them. They are less outspoken people and will always compromise to make a situation work.

Choosing to Explain Their Identity

Barbara's boyfriend Jack expressed his confusion about Barbara's identity. He did not understand how she could be American but be Burmese-Chinese as well. Barbara needed to explain to Jack that she was an American and an American citizen and that she is from America. She states, "I've had to sit him down and explain to him that I am American. I think it's hard to explain because people don't understand how you can be from a certain place when you are of another race." Jack does not understand how she can say that she is American when she is Burmese. For Jack, Barbara's race and ethnicity confuse him as she is Burmese though she is American as she has grown up and been surrounded by Americans all her life.

In Barbara's opinion, he also does not understand how she sees him as having a lot of White privilege. Jack does not believe he has White privilege whatsoever as she remembers Jack saying he does not believe in the concept "White privilege". Barbara says that Jack responded to her defensively stating, "this is dumb and White privilege is not a thing." They have different views on how they perceive themselves and each other. Jack views himself as a White American individual who has no White privilege though Barbara believes he does have it. Meanwhile, Jack also has a very difficult time understanding how she can be American.

There are further little things Jack forgets, like that Barbara does not know specific Western ideas because she did not fully grow up in America. She moved to Asia because of her dad's job though she was born in America. The other day, she drove in the snow a few weeks ago and she told him she was scared she was going to break her Aunt's car and Jack said harshly like "no no no this is normal like why don't you know this by now?" And Barbara had to explain that she never had to drive in the snow before. Jack assumed she knew things when she did not. She felt like he could not understand her way of life that was different from his own. Barbara took a great amount of time educating him in order for him to start adjusting and understanding who she is and how she grew up.

In two of my interviews with Andrea and Melody, both their boyfriends learned their traditional language. In these two cases, the language is Chinese. These men had learned the woman's language while they were friends before they began dating. This was a nice action as they show that they are open to learning more about Andrea and Melody's culture by first trying to learn about the culture of communication. This also gives them an advantage with these women's parents as language is important in communicating with elders who do not know much English. Many parents were impressed by their daughter's boyfriends based on the fact that these men knew their native language.

Holding Back Their Culture

These women are conforming to American norms while leaving behind old East Asian ways and are okay with it. Conforming to American culture leads to not discussing every little thing with their partners about their East Asian culture, as it is to my participants they deem it

unnecessary and feel almost completely Americanized anyway. With this attitude, their East Asian culture likely will eventually be lost as they feel certain information is extraneous and will never need to bring it to a discussion in their relationships.

Sophie never had to discuss her culture in depth until Victor met her family. Her family is the only indicator of her traditional Vietnamese culture and without stepping into this realm of her life she is very Americanized. She says that Victor is fascinated with learning about Vietnamese culture and intrigued about wanting to learn more but she feels it is sometimes too much. He is obsessed with Vietnamese culture. Victor often asks her what everything in Vietnamese means and Sophie does not always know because she cannot read and write perfectly. She grew up speaking Vietnamese, but specifically only learned everyday words so she cannot read and write fluently.

She says sometimes they would see a sign or a billboard and Victor would be like “what does that say?” and Sophie goes “I don't know what that says” and he is like “don't you speak Vietnamese?” and she goes, “Yeah! I speak Vietnamese. I can't read and write in it though!” She says she can talk to her grandmother all day long though. Mainly Victor will be like, “how do you say this in Vietnamese?... What do you mean you don't know?” Or if she is talking to her grandmother in Vietnamese Victor would ask “what did you say?” Sophie gets really irritated about situations like when Victor asks her what every little thing means in Vietnamese. Sophie says Victor is extremely open to her culture and loves Vietnamese food which she believes is great. Though she thinks he likes her culture a little too much where there are times she feels like not sharing her beliefs and her culture with him because he is almost too eager to the point where it is annoying to her. Similar to Shirley, she feels almost “exoticized” where he seems sometimes

too eager to learn about her culture. Sophie does not find it flattering whatsoever when Americans become obsessed with East Asian culture.

Sophie believes that in the long run, these cultural differences should be bringing them together because he does want to learn more. However, in the short term, she does get annoyed at certain situations like when he is constantly questioning her about everything Vietnamese and when he makes Asian jokes. For example, they were watching the movie “Creed 2” and they were watching it in Russian so she was pretending to know what they were saying just making up captions for fun. Eventually, Victor went “I wish you would do this when we watch Vietnamese movies” and Sophie snapped, back “A) we don’t watch Vietnamese movies, B) I wouldn’t be doing this for you, and C) just why?” She was very annoyed by this comment because she felt he was being insensitive and just did not understand how she struggles with her Vietnamese as she does not use it on a daily basis. Additionally, she speaks English normally so she felt irritated at Victor seemingly testing her on her Vietnamese which she wishes was better. She feels very Americanized and gets very irritated when she knows she is Vietnamese. She has a hard time fully embracing her Vietnamese self as she has forgotten a good amount of that culture to be a part of American culture.

Impacts

Even though these women state that their partners are very understanding of their culture, the experiences they share sometimes state otherwise. These women are constantly sharing their culture with their partners and educating them as well. There are also patterns of discomfort in these women’s “exoticism” where the women feel like they are under a microscope.

In general, they had to show these men how important family is to them. Nevertheless, most women find men who have similar values to them. There is a disconnect between how these women perceive these men as understanding and similar to them and the conflict and disagreement within their relationships. On the surface, these conflicts tend to look like any other relationship issue yet once I dug in deeper, I could see how these issues would derive from each of their cultures. Each of these individuals prioritizes different values and have their own lifestyle that they are used to. The identity crisis is visible between the East Asian women's ethnicity and their race. They have a difficult time finding a balance and also understanding where they stand within American society. These White American men work hard to learn more about East Asian women's culture and lives. They tend to not fully understand aspects of these women's lives, therefore, it takes conflict to find a solution. Yet in any relationship, there are going to be topics that a couple will disagree on and this is how these women in an interracial relationship view these conflicts.

Chapter 4: Exploring Gender, Ethnicity within Interracial Relationships

This chapter explores how these individuals perceive each other, handle gender within their relationships, and how these two individuals end up together. The chapter navigates the relationship between the two as well as the gender roles and identity of each of the individuals. Throughout my research, East Asian American women perceive White American men a certain way which almost contrasts to how they see East Asian men. Gender as a social construct is very important to look at here. “Gender is socially constructed and is performative. It varies by culture and historical moment, but the distinct categories of “man” and “woman” and “boy” and “girl” function to maintain male dominance over women and marginalized or subordinated men.” (Chou 2015, p. 30). Gender starts the second one is born and is reproduced within the home depending on immigration status, the nation of origin, tradition and so forth (Chou 2015, p. 32). I am using gender to look at the binary categories of man and woman and the distinction of them in the paper. Within gender is power, power of the masculine over the feminine. As this is socially constructed, this power play is constantly happening over and over again in American society.

Family impacts how these women perceive themselves as they have been raised subordinate to East Asian men. Mothers raise these women by reiterating the importance of how they outwardly appear. Sarah’s mother would constantly be telling her to take a shower, to put makeup on, and to appear presentable. Therefore, the importance of representation and appearing feminine is ingrained in these East Asian women. Nonetheless, women in these relationships confirm that they do not follow all of their gender norms. We see particularly in these interracial relationships that they are breaking more of these gender norms as these women become more

outspoken, independent, and free from the boundaries of their old cultural norms. When searching for a partner there are certain characteristics and traits that these women look for.

Views on masculinity in men for these women are important in how they choose their partner. Chou states that “Lessons on manhood for these women focused on being responsible, educated, financially stable, career man who retains some home culture values.” These lessons on manhood mostly were derived from parents where career was extremely important. Similar to Chou’s study, my respondents also felt more pressure from forces outside the home to meet Westernized standards of beauty and socially constructed gender norms (2015, p. 32). From external forces, society creates these standards and norms that ultimately shape what women and men are attracted to in a partner. For my respondents, when asked what type of men they usually go for, many of my respondents would answer with the single word “athletic”. They usually state that they liked athletic individuals that normally happen to be White.

The reason these individuals happen to be White was because my respondents do not consider East Asian men as athletic and masculine. These women view East Asian men negatively as individuals who are constantly trying to prove their masculinity and their machoness. This constant need to prove themselves shows an insecurity which causes them to be even more controlling of their girlfriends. This is an unattractive quality for Asian American women which may lead to their decision of choosing White American men. Though these women do choose White American men, this does not mean that their relationships are perfect and conflict-free. In certain cases with these interracial relationships, couples will fight about the lack of communication and scheduling; this issue happens to usually be the women who feel this way more than the men. Hence their fights are not always completely race-based.

Nevertheless, throughout all the interviews the majority of the women state that they feel that they are treated well and feel extremely comfortable with their partner and the relationship as a whole. Even though there are certain stereotypes and cultural differences that they sometimes need to navigate through, all these women state that they feel like equals.

The Perception of White Masculinity vs. East Asian Masculinity

The perception of masculinity is important here as it becomes very distinct how race influences the kind of masculinity that is socially produced. Masculinity is different and specific for White Americans and East Asians. Multiple women find that they are attracted to White American men because of several factors that include physical features as well as personality traits. These women view White American men as people who are normally athletic, strong, funny, and understanding. They tend to think of White American men as more masculine as just the way they are in the way they carry themselves. East Asian women I interviewed state that White American men can be more understanding of them than other men as they have similar values as them. This stereotype of White American men becomes a positive stereotype where individuals like my respondents are more drawn to partnerships with these men.

Andrea has only ever dated White American men and gives her reasons why. She finds that White American men are often more masculine than other races. Since she does Thai Boxing, she feels, because she is already an athletic person, she needs a man who can keep up with her and is athletic as well. For her, she thinks it is a little weird when she is more fit than her boyfriend. Specifically, she feels because she is really athletic where she works out normally she wants someone who is more athletic than her. She states, "A lot of Asian guys that I've met are like not really into that. Yeah so it's just a difference in interest. I don't know if it's just my

personal experience so far but it does seem like [White American men] are most athletic and more athletically inclined, definitely a little more masculine.” The connection of athleticism with masculinity are intertwined here where my respondents constantly use these terms with one another to describe the other. Those who are more athletic are deemed more masculine and Andrea feels that she does not see athletic Asian guys often. If you see an athletic East Asian man they are seen as outliers from the group of East Asian men. Andrea sees White American men as athletic, and the East Asians guys she has met have normally been unathletic. Thus the difference in masculinity to her is very obvious though could be influenced by population sizes as White American men are the dominant racial group within America making up 76.6% of the total population while Asian Americans make up 3.5 % (U.S. Census 2017). This population data shows why there are less athletic East Asian American men as there are just fewer East Asian men in general present in the United States.

Along with these statistics, Andrea’s describes her boyfriend David as funny, understanding, and dresses well; which she also admits she finds mostly in White American men. She does not think she can find this same trend in East Asian American men. As she tries to put together her thoughts about East Asian men she states, “there are just some parts of and the way they carry themselves and the way they dress. It's just like the way White people carry themselves and the way they dress. I don't know how to explain it. But it’s just different like they're more confident.” Andrea sees White American men as regularly confident and athletic and she believes that because she is slightly more masculine herself, she needs a man who is more than she is. This trend of women who want men who are more masculine than they are reproduces cultural norms of heteronormativity. “Heteronormativity defines not only a normative

sexual practice but also a normal way of life” (Stark 1991, p. 107). This normal way of life creates a power play between men and women where men remain the dominant partner and women remain subordinate. In Andrea’s case, she will only date men who are more athletic than her and she does not want to be more athletic than her partner.

She also feels like she chooses not to date East Asian American men because most of these men do not carry themselves in a way that is innately confident. Confidence is also highly associated with masculinity as well. To Andrea, she believes her choice to date White American men is because of their athleticism, style, and confidence. Her boyfriend David is about 5’11, has blue eyes, brunette hair, and is a strong muscular guy. David played football, wrestled in high school, and works out regularly. Furthermore, David fits into her description of a White American depicted very positively as a man who is athletic, confident, stylish, and funny.

Similarly, Wendy also likes that her boyfriend is athletic; she describes him as a man who does not possess huge muscles, but has a lean, and toned soccer body. She likes how her boyfriend is more lean than super muscular as his muscles will not turn into fat as he ages. She states, “I was naturally attracted to anyone who was athletically fit and really just could keep up with me. After that, it was about holding a conversation and making sure we have the same kind of life goals.” She admits that it first began with the outward appearance and then it dove into personality traits. She goes on to define her boyfriend Lucas having these specific desirable traits, “athletic, dark hair, lean, a good eater. I think that has always been something that has been important to me. Someone who is not picky as an eater. Just being a good person and wanting to take care of people.” Athleticism remains the common agreed upon trait that men must have when searching for a partner. It is important for Wendy to have a partner that can

work out and exercise with her and not be less athletic than she is. Again, reproducing heteronormative behavior by only accepting men as a partner who are more athletic than she is.

Athleticism is essential to these women especially when the woman herself is fit. Sophie Yu also states that she likes “White Athletic guys.” She discusses how she grew up and what her education was like where her High School was predominately White with the same students attending school from grade 6 - 12. She continues to ponder why she likes the men she describes, declaring that she believes she is into the athletic type because she is also an athlete. She states that it is similar to when you have to pick a roommate for college. If you are a sports team, they put you with another sports player because they understand your schedule and understand what it is like. As Sophie is currently a sports coach and her boyfriend is a coach as well she says, “I think I just connect better if I am coaching and playing if I want to rant or talk about what’s happening. It’s just better chemistry and better understanding I think.” These women have found that the men who they are attracted to are athletic or at least more athletic than they are. Sophie believes that it is important to find someone who has similarities to herself as discussing her everyday life becomes easier that way.

For these women, it is important to find men who are athletic and similar to them as they do not want a man who is less athletic than they are. Several women also convey that East Asian men are also usually shorter in height than White American men. Height matters for these women as height denotes masculinity. They want a man who appears more masculine than them as they believe that women should always be shorter and more feminine. Here masculinity and femininity are at play where it is a huge issue when women do not want someone who is seemingly more feminine than they are. They associate those who are not athletic and short with

femininity, which is a turnoff for these East Asian women. Here gender is at involved because these East Asian women want to be more feminine than their partners and could not deal with having a partner who was less athletic or shorter than they are. These East Asian women need men who are more masculine in this regard compared to them. Society keeps definitions of gender where there are norms of what it means to be a man and what it means to be a woman; also what a relationship should look like between the two.

Masculinity and its Impacts

My respondents have the perception that East Asian men are not athletic and masculine and that East Asian men try too hard to compensate for what they do not have. Melody has explained that this happens based on certain East Asian values which can perpetuate traditional values. These traditional values promote extreme sexism in the household for that type of relationship. Melody confidently states why she does not date anyone other than Chinese and American men. She has her reasons for not dating Japanese, Hong Kong, and Taiwanese men and says specifically about Korean men that “Korean boys have this very alpha male syndrome that they want to control everything. To be the Alpha male. Yeah. So I’ve heard a lot of stories and my friend dated Korean boys and they break up and are sad because they can’t be who they are.” Melody feels like this type of masculinity is destructive and really puts women down where their role is to just be pretty and to be a wife. To play the role of the wife means to do the housework like cleaning and cooking, to raise kids, and to have less of a say when it comes to big decisions. From this interview, I find that relationships between East Asian American women

and men have a stronger power play happening in comparison to the relationships with East Asian American women and White American men.

Masculinity for the White American man is seen as positive whereas for the East Asian man it is seen as negative. There seems to be good masculinity and bad masculinity. For the White American, it is seen as hot and attractive and appealing. But for East Asians, masculinity is more controlling and restricting of these men towards women. These women certainly do not want to be objectified or treated in this way. They are convinced that because East Asian men lack masculinity, they try to compensate for what they do not have by pushing women down. Therefore these East Asian women view American men as more understanding compared to East Asian men. These women also believe that men of the White race have similar values as them. My respondents view East Asian men as having a power struggle where they are constantly trying to raise up their status while White American men are at more of an equal level as them. Therefore these women do not associate masculinity with East Asian men at all.

These East Asian women like how White American men are masculine and feel that East Asian men are not masculine enough for them. In certain cases, East Asian women are repelled by a man who is less masculine because it leads to the women feeling masculine herself. She wants a man that is physically strong and manly, yet lets her be her own person. East Asians tend to have, according to these women, controlling personalities which are not attractive whatsoever to these East Asian women. As men in both cases of White and East Asian are both at a higher status and hold power over these women, these women feel it is less extreme with White American men.

In these interracial relationships, although fetishization is not discussed much throughout my interviews it is present but very limited. A lot of the partners of these women have not dated an Asian woman before dating them, proving that for them this is not considered a fetish. These White American partners are not dating these women based on an obsession with Asian culture or Asian perceptions of beauty. These specific men are not dating East Asian women for these reasons and do not view them as objects. A variety of respondents including Sophie's boyfriend dated all girls who were White American before her.

Though, Sophie recalls how she almost dated a White American man who had dated all Asians. "He had a thing for East Asians and he told me." She says he was her friend from volleyball. She describes him as really tall and good at volleyball consequently she had considered dating him as he was both athletic and tall. But then she decided against it when she found out that his best friend was Asian and only dated Asians. He clearly had a thing for Asians and this made Sophie feel uncomfortable. She felt uncomfortable as he was actively preferring to only date Asians. Sophie figured he may choose to be with Asians for their physical appearance which he felt was more beautiful than the other races. Nevertheless, she was extremely unsettled by this. This case shows that although these specific women I interviewed do not have partners who fetishize them, there are men who do have this fetish. However, I cannot account for the number as I did not interview men who had this pattern. Judging from those who I interviewed, it does not seem likely that this fetishization is a popular belief about East Asian women as this was just one case. But fetishization exists whether it be subconscious or not as it can be seen within the men who only date East Asian women.

In another case, Sarah's boyfriend Raymond had never dated anyone identifying as East Asian before her. Before dating Sarah, Raymond had previously shared with her that he was convinced he would never date an Asian girl in his lifetime. He never saw himself with a woman of the East Asian race because he thought they were too different as people. Raymond made this judgement based on what he thought East Asian women were like. Though after meeting Sarah, he surprised himself when they hit it off and had many more similarities than he imagined. Meanwhile, Sarah had dated other White American men as well as East Asians in the past consequently she was already open to different types of relationships. In addition, Sarah is of the third generation so she was quite Americanized already which allows her to get along more easily with Raymond. The longer these women are in the United States, the easier it is for them to get along with American people in general.

Household Life

When looking at gender, household life should be studied to see how these individuals operate on a day-to-day basis. Gender will be apparent in this section as household duties may be divided as well as other day-to-day responsibilities. This enables a better understanding of what the everyday lives of those who are in interracial relationships are like.

Sophie Yu's typical day consists of her boyfriend Jack waking up at 6:30 am to get to class. She dislikes how early he rises in the morning as she is not a morning person, though she tries often to have breakfast with him. Usually, when Jack has class, she also has class. In the afternoons Jack has to coach baseball which means that Sophie does not get to see him much. That is until they are both done with classes and their work. By the night time, they try to eat

dinner together. She expresses that she is usually the one who cleans. She says, “I typically do the laundry because I get a little OCD with the folding. He doesn’t care about clothes, anything with clothes he hates, so I’ll do the laundry and we kind of do half and half of the dishes. Usually, I’ll do more of the dishes because I’m just home more. In terms of organization, I’ll do it because he just doesn’t care. So I’ll organize where things go.” Because Sophie is home more, she tends to do the cleaning, laundry, and dishes. Even though this is how it is now, she declares that she does not believe it will be this way in the future as she believes she will be the one making more money than her boyfriend in the future. Nevertheless, she does not know for how long this will happen so, for now, she is a homebody doing all the household duties.

Sarah Lee has been dating Raymond for about eight years; she and him both have full-time jobs. Normally, he travels during the week as he works at a management consulting firm. He wakes up quite early on Monday mornings to catch a flight at 4:00-5:00 am and Sarah will wake up around 7:30 am and make coffee ritually. She will later eat something and head to work. Sarah is currently in digital marketing at Happy Foods and also is in culinary school part-time, taking cooking classes on Sundays. Typically on the weekends, she and Raymond have routines where they regularly cook and go rock climbing together. In terms of household duties, she says they “stick to [their] strengths for household duties. [They] just do everything, whatever needs to be done, sometimes he’ll clean. [She’ll] do laundry or vice versa.” Their home life involves the two of them doing what needs to be done, depending on who decides to do what at that moment of time. Sarah agrees that she is the messier partner in their relationship so he usually organizes the house. They have more of a disorganized home life where that specific system tends to work for both of them. In this case, Raymond organizes and cleans the house

more often since Sarah is the messier partner. Gender norms in the household are not stereotypical here. This couple's strengths tend to initiate Raymond to do more of the household cleaning while Sarah and Raymond will both work together to cook meals.

In contrast to Sarah, Wendy moved to China for her husband's job in order to support him. Wendy chose to give up her job in Atlanta for their move to China. She decided to drop her life in Atlanta and move for her husband Lucas's job in China because it paid more. They recently moved there and now she currently has no job and has been traveling which she appears to be very happy about. Lucas became more of the provider while Wendy supported him and his opportunity. She explained how she left her REI (Recreational Equipment, Inc.) retail job for her move to China. She states she will take a step backward and do art thus focusing on what she got her degree in which was Studio Arts with a minor in Marketing. She will sell some of her artwork on Etsy and do administrative work at home as well. Her relationship goals are to travel as she states this is her opportunity to since they are overseas. Her life has changed quite drastically from how she and her partner used to live.

Before her move to China, their daily routine was very different. If Wendy was working and doing a morning shift, they would wake up together. Lucas would make coffee and since Wendy worked at the REI store, she would not get lunch; therefore, Lucas would make her lunch so she could get out the door. When they both finished work they would usually hang out for the rest of the day, go to the gym, watch Netflix, and either cook or go out for dinner. Their household roles evolved with the husband as the typical breadwinner and Wendy as the stay at home wife once they made their move to China. Even though this is currently how their household operates, there is still respect and equality provided to one another.

In Mindy's opinion, she feels her and her partner Nathan try to split household duties equally, though feels she does more of them. She specifically says, "I do a lot of cooking. He does do some dishwashing, he puts Sarah to sleep while I finish cleaning up. I give her a bath and every once in a while he'll cook when I can't pick Sarah up or something." They both give and take and when one is busy the other makes up for it and it usually all depends on scheduling and how busy they are. Gender in the household is not obvious, but in certain ways, the women are the ones who are usually cleaning which can be seen as a harmful norm. Traditional gender stereotypes in the household are detrimental to the family and the relationship as "high levels of homophobia and low levels of intimacy were found among those who believe strongly in the traditional roles" (Stark 1991, p. 1). Attempting to do constantly follow gender becomes damaging to one's mental state if they are merely following a norm just because they feel more accepted. People follow these norms as shame and embarrassment by others keep individuals in line with normative behaviors created by society.

I was able to see how much these women are present or not present within the household in order to see if these relationships consist of the traditional household stereotypes of gender or not. In the majority of these relationships, there is no clear line between the roles in households. It does seem like the women are still the ones who remain more in the household but these women, except Wendy, have a job and are currently working. Maintaining strong traditional norms within the household emphasizes a man's power over a woman's. This then causes masculinity to be at utmost power. Even though this was the case, I heard no indication of strong problems within their relationships of homophobia. Except from a situation, as stated earlier, for Andrea where her father was adamant about her not dating a woman. However, these

relationships do not reflect this mindset. These women express how they feel like they are treated as equals.

The White American Man & The East Asian American Woman

Typically White American men are seen as having achieved the highest social mobility. Melissa Finucane describes the 'White male' effect as showing their higher statuses. She states in regards to crime rates that "30% of the White male sample that judged risks to be extremely low. When these low-risk White males (LRWM) were compared with the rest of the respondents, they were found to be better educated, had higher household incomes, and were politically more conservative" (Finucane 2000, p. 160). The respondents that the White men were compared to were to White females, non-White males, and non-White females. White American men are viewed as more wealthy, successful, and well educated than all of the other categories.

From the perspective of these East Asian women, their views of White American men are similar to this study. For my respondents, what it means to be a White American man is a gentleman who confident, athletic, strong, funny, stylish, and understanding. They are observed as both strong, yet sensitive and understanding. Their perception of the White American man seems to include a lot of positive features one would want in a partner according to these East Asian women. These men also tend to have comparable values to East Asian women where the family is of utmost importance. Though even though these White American men put their family first, they are more open to arguments while capable of maintaining close relationships with their families. These White American men seem to be what East Asian women want where even though these men are very masculine, they still are giving East Asian women their freedom and

choice in what they can do in their lives. They are not restricting like East Asian women believe East Asian men are like.

The East Asian woman's identity in America is seen as constantly changing where they are caught between their East Asian identity and American identity. These women are labelled with stereotypes that put them at a disadvantage. East Asian women are viewed as cold, yet competent people. "The prescription that East Asians be nondominant helps to reinforce the glass (or "bamboo") ceiling. Keeping East Asians "cold" by punishing them when they are warm will help sustain the stereotype of "yellow peril" and justify excluding them from affiliative social networks crucial for career success." (Berdhal 2012, p. 150). With this perception, East Asians cannot win despite how they attempt to present themselves; therefore making it more difficult for East Asian women to achieve upward mobility and fully acculturate into American society.

There are indeed still those who view East Asian women as still a foreign, sexualized, object. This can be seen within media in how women have been portrayed. At the same time, East Asian American women are acculturating to American society where they are becoming more and more accepted within American society. These women of the second generation or more have grown up speaking English fluently, dressing in American fashion, watching American media, and have attended school with individuals in the United States. Thus, the majority of their friends are White American or East Asian American. East Asian American women are nevertheless still finding their identity while immersing themselves into American society. They go against traditions but maintain certain traditions which show with their values towards their family and the intense loyalty they hold for them.

When East Asian culture is portrayed in American media, it is troublesome how stereotypically wrong East Asians are often portrayed. Barbara describes a situation where she felt extremely uncomfortable with how an East Asian woman was represented in the media. She watched a movie with an East Asian character in it who was stereotyped as a sexual, fetishized woman on television. Barbara was upset as it was not an accurate representation of East Asian women in her opinion. It was a stereotypical kinky Japanese girl. She explains that it is not something she usually would feel uncomfortable with but for some reason, this made her really uncomfortable. She explains by describing her situation where she is sitting in a room with all her White friends and “the only East Asian character in this movie was a girl that is like weird”. Because everyone watching the movie was White, she felt they were absorbing and possibly perpetuating this stereotype by believing that East Asian women are normally like that. During it, she felt like everyone was looking at her, even though she says they were not. She fears this puts a negative perception of her identity. She fears they believe “this is who you are or how you are” normalizing this behavior as what an East Asian woman is like.

Barbara believes because it is hard to change the mindset of how people perceive East Asian women; this mindset of how East Asians are perceived in a degrading way is still prevalent today.

“Especially with Asians, it's that whole binary of Black and White where people just see race as Black and White and if you are in the middle you are just privileged because you are neither Black or White. Everything is about money to people and conservatives and that's kind of my biggest thing like, yes Asian men and Asian women do make about the same amount as White people or make more, but that doesn't mean that we are still

treated fairly or equally within the system. We are so underspoken because traditionally Asians are just more submissive and now that people do speak up, people are like now these Asian people are taking it so seriously! (Barbara, 21).

Barbara touches on the fact that within the United States she feels that East Asians are extremely underspoken. Traditionally East Asians have been told that speaking up and voicing their opinions have been a negative trait within their culture. They see this behavior as disrespectful and should never happen especially when you are a child and everyone is considered an elder and you must respect your elders. However, living in the United States in a different culture allows these women to speak up more than they have in the past. Now that East Asian Americans are just now being heard, Barbara says people assume that East Asians are overreacting. She feels that there is a great discussion about racism with Blacks and Whites, yet it is just binary where other races are way less conferred about in conversation about discrimination which means that people are less aware of the stance that East Asians have in America.

How East Asian American Women End Up With White American Men

These East Asian American women are attracted to White American men because they are masculine yet understanding. Because family pressures have shown that these women choose to only date one of East Asian race or White American race, they choose the White American race as these East Asian women believe they have better masculine qualities.

Appearance is important as Wendy Kim thinks that Asian guys tend to look too much like her brother which is definitely a turn off for her. Wendy finds those men who are of the

same race as her less attractive. She becomes repulsed at the idea of how they remind her of her brother because of their same physical features. She likes that White American men are very different from what she looks like and dislikes when a couple looks like they could be siblings. This is one of the reasons Wendy would choose a White American individual over an East Asian American because of how similar she believes they are in physical appearance to her.

Location & Environment

Among the women I interviewed, they have one similarity where they are all friends with the same types of people where all of their friends are of similar races. These women tend to surround themselves and choose friends who are either White or East Asian. They rarely had any friends outside of these two race categories. These East Asian American women believe they are drawn more to these individuals because they are able to get along easiest with them. Since they come from an East Asian background and choose to assimilate into White Western culture, this is why they are most comfortable with these two groups. These two groups are most prevalent and appear most in their lives.

All of my respondents either met their partner at their place of work or at school in college. Wendy Ping met her boyfriend at a local climbing gym. Sarah met her boyfriend during her night out at a college party in Boston. Barbara also met her boyfriend during her night out at a college bar. Shirley met her boyfriend at school and directly messaged him on Instagram. Lastly, Melody met her boyfriend at a study abroad program for Princeton University where they both attended. All of these individuals met through some sort of organization or event. They met

their partner either at school or at work and a few of these individuals are now conducting long distance relationships.

Andrea states that she is not closed off to East Asian guys but it has never panned out “And it just so happens that guys that I've met so far have been White”. Sophie also states that at her college there were not really any Asian athletic guys. The location of where these couples met is significant as there is a pattern. The pattern shows that East Asian Americans are surrounded by White American men in these situations. There are more White American men surrounding these women than East Asian men. Population sizes influence the relationships between these East Asian women and White American men to an extent. In the United States, Asians alone make up 5.8% of the total population while White alone (not Hispanic or Latino) make up 60.7% of the population (U.S. Census 2017). The population of 5.8% of Asians is a small pool to find partners within. Therefore these statistics on population sizes makes it highly likely for East Asians to marry out into the majority population since that population is larger in size.

Impacts

East Asian American women have their reasons for dating White American men. There are specific characteristics that they find attractive in men. Masculinity plays a vital role in how these women choose men as they prefer those who are White American over East Asian. In comparing masculinity, White masculinity is more attractive than East Asian masculinity as White masculinity is considered less controlling. These East Asian women want their freedom and their say within a relationship which they feel they can only get in partnership with a White

American man. Masculinity in both appearance and personality, as well as their understanding of East Asian culture, is essential for an East Asian woman in a White American man. The perceptions of White American men and East Asian American women is significant as this provides a reason for why or why not these couples get together. East Asian American women are always struggling with their identity and how they fit into American society. They can be also seen as cold and not being able to achieve higher success within the workplace, yet many of my respondents are still working women. Meanwhile, White American men are at the top of the hierarchy for status. Although these women are still working, the majority of them still state they are doing most of the housework such as cleaning and cooking. Even though these couples are defying certain gender stereotypes, they still follow others within the household.

There are several reasons why these individuals unite that have to do with similarities, differences, and attraction based on social norms. Gender plays a significant role in regards to attraction and differences. Women and men are following their gender norms which cause them to choose specific types of men. In these interviews, White American men seem to epitomize what these East Asian women want. Other beliefs about this could be how they all met while they were at school or work showing that location and proximity plays a huge role in their meeting and dating. These couples perceive each other differently from how they perceive themselves.

Conclusion

Ultimately all of these couples that I interviewed in interracial relationships have specific cultural differences they must navigate through. These differences are all qualities or characteristics that they are able to work through in order for a better understanding of one another which they eventually believe will bring them closer together. However, more information and more interviews need to be conducted in order to fully explore this topic. Nonetheless, this project is a useful way to understand East Asian women's impressions of their relationship and why they believe they date White American men. This project and its interviews reveal why these women tend to prefer to be with White American men. The family remains the most influential and critical aspect of both of these individuals. How they approach their family is different where East Asians put respect at an extremely high value and cannot talk back to their parents while White American men are able to do so. Opinions that family members have on interracial relationships with White American men do impact their relationship choices. However, these women ultimately choose who they want to date and family opinions do not have enough of an impact for a respondent to break up with her partner.

Even with the many cultural differences these couples must navigate through, they have remained together for a year or longer. All of my respondents have partners who are extremely open to getting to know their culture showing that these men show no obvious prejudice to these women's cultures. When looking at how gender applies for these women, they perceive masculinity as a spectrum where extreme masculinity is detrimental. These are the reasons many of my respondents believe they are not homogamous and do not date East Asian men as they believe East Asian men possess this extreme masculinity. As much as these women believe they

are consciously choosing to date White American men, it must be stated that location and their environment within the United States play a substantial role. Population sizes show that it is much more likely that East Asian women will marry out towards the largest population size group, the White population. Ultimately this research shows that there are conscious decisions acknowledged by my respondents when choosing a partner that involve family, perceptions, and masculinity. East Asian American women are often misunderstood and perceived unrealistically by American society. The couples I interview have relationships that are not clear cut and straight forward. A great amount of analysis must occur to learn what these relationships are truly like.

Appendix

Questions For My Respondents:

1. How old are you?
2. When did your parents move to the United States?
3. What is your ethnicity?
4. Where were you born? Where do you live now?
5. Where do you consider home? Homesick with both
6. Who are you currently in a relationship with?
7. How old is he?
8. How did you two meet?
9. When did you two meet?
10. How long have you two been together?
11. Could you walk me through a typical day/week of your lives?
12. How do you divide the household duties?
13. What activities do you do together? (Separately)
14. What are cultural differences that you two have discussed?
15. How do the cultural differences bring you two together?
16. How do cultural differences make things difficult?
17. What are both of your values like?
18. What have been difficulties in your relationship? If you guys have disagreements, what are they normally about?
19. Do you feel they respect your culture?

20. How if at all do you talk about cultural differences? What have you not talked about?
21. Who do you hang out with? Who is in your community?
22. How did your friends react to your relationship?
23. What are your current occupational statuses?
24. What are your future career/relationship goals?
25. Where are your parents from? Tell me about your family.
26. Does anyone in your family have experiences of interracial relationships? (sisters, cousins)
27. How did your family respond to your relationship? (Siblings, parents, extended family)
28. Did you have any family pressures for your relationships? (Parents)
29. How do you feel about your partner? What drew you toward them?
30. What was your first impression of your partner?
31. Are there certain things that you had to adjust to after being in a relationship with your partner?
32. Have you dated a White American individual before? What type of men have you dated in the past?
33. Has your partner dated an East Asian woman before? What type of women have you dated in the past?
34. What is your type when describing a partner?

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