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THE COMPLEXITY OF “ASIAN AMERICAN IDENTITY”: THE INTERSECTION  
OF MULTIPLE SOCIAL IDENTITIES

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THE COMPLEXITY OF “ASIAN AMERICAN IDENTITY”: THE INTERSECTION  
OF MULTIPLE SOCIAL IDENTITIES

by

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THE COMPLEXITY OF “ASIAN AMERICAN IDENTITY”: THE INTERSECTION  
OF MULTIPLE SOCIAL IDENTITIES

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The current study investigated the complexity of identity within the Asian American population in order to broaden the definition of Asian American identity beyond race and ethnicity. Using the Multidimensional Identity Model (Reynolds & Pope, 1991) as a conceptual framework, the study examined how individuals manage the multiple social identities of age, ethnicity, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic class and the saliency of their various social identities. Participants were 287 Asian Americans, ranging in age from 18 to 63 ( $M = 28.48$ ). Sixteen Asian ethnicities were represented in the sample, including Chinese, Korean, Indian, Filipino, and others. Participants completed a demographics form, the Rosenberg (1965) Self-Esteem Scale, the Satisfaction With Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985), and the Social Group Identification Scale (developed for this study). The Social

Group Identification Scale asked respondents to rate social group categories on a Likert scale based on two instructional conditions – self-view of social identities and perceived societal view of one’s social identities. This scale also examined participants’ experience of conflict regarding their social identities as well as the difference between their perception of societal views and their self-view of social group identities.

The results indicated that the most salient social identities for the Asian American participants were ethnicity, race, and gender. The least salient social identity was religion. Four cluster profiles created through a *k*-means cluster analysis varied in terms of the level of salience of various social identities but did not differ significantly in self-esteem or life satisfaction. Some participants experienced inner conflict regarding their social identities and used various strategies to manage them. Participants generally perceived that certain social identities (i.e., race, ethnicity, gender, age, and socioeconomic status) were assigned more strongly by society than by the participants themselves. The results provided empirical evidence supporting some of the Multidimensional Identity Model in that the salience of multiple social identities varied, and the intersection of multiple social identities was evident in individuals’ self-definition. The results suggest expansion of the Multidimensional Identity Model regarding conflict and the influence of the social environment on self-definition.



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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Psychological research concerning Asian Americans often focuses on either ethnic identity or acculturation and less frequently, on racial identity. This research sometimes attempts to generalize study results to all Asian Americans, consequently creating a simplified representation of a very diverse population. Thus, there is a need to broaden the definition of identity for Asian Americans. An investigation of the intersection of multiple identities within Asian Americans would address the complexity of identity in this population. Furthermore, there needs to be a focus on the individual's subjective experience of the salient aspects of his/her identity in relation to societal views, which are often dictated by the most "visible" characteristics of the individual. Salience of identity needs to be considered because if only one aspect of identity is explored in research, there is the danger of making an erroneous assumption about the individual's subjective experience. Researchers who investigate single aspects of identity may inadvertently (or deliberately) assume that a particular aspect of identity is the most salient or important part of identity development for the participants being studied when it may not be. This dissertation explores the intersection of multiple identities as well as salience of different aspects of identity in Asian Americans and the psychological processes associated with managing multiple identities.

The sociopolitical racial category of Asian/Pacific Islander American is

commonly referred to as “Asian American.” It is a diverse group consisting of over twenty-five ethnic groups, including Asian Indians, Koreans, Chinese, Filipino/as, Samoans, and Laotians (Espiritu, 1992; Uba, 1994). In some instances, the term “Asian Pacific American” is used in the literature as it is more accurate and inclusive of those of Pacific Islander descent who also fall into this category. For the purpose of this dissertation, the term “Asian American” will be used because of greater familiarity with this term; however, it should be understood that this category includes the full range of ethnic groups found in the Asian-Pacific rim.

The diversity within the Asian American population is reflected in differences in ethnic background, age, sex, immigration history, religion, language, citizenship, socioeconomic class and sexual orientation. Therefore, it is expected that identity development would also vary greatly among Asian American individuals. Moreover, conceptualizing identity development in Asian Americans from the perspective of multiple identities in research studies would portray a more accurate representation of the diverse backgrounds and experiences that exist in this population beyond ethnic identity and acculturation.

In recent years, there has been an increase in examining more complex constructs in racial and ethnic minority psychological research. This research acknowledges that categorical demographic variables alone cannot account for the subjective experiences of social group membership. For example, there has been a move from studying “ethnicity” to “ethnic identity”, mostly in recognition that there is a psychological construct related to the individual’s experience and understanding of her/his ethnic group affiliation

(Phinney, 1989). There has been a similar shift from examining “race” as a variable to “racial identity” as a psychological construct although little research has been conducted with Asian Americans. It is no longer sufficient to consider only the demographic label of “ethnicity” or “race” as a variable, and identity development models have been created to map out how individuals experience social group memberships, like ethnicity and race. Erikson’s psychosocial identity development theory has served as the basis of several of these identity development models, including racial and ethnic identity development (Carter, 1997; Cass, 1979; Helms, 1990; Phinney, 1989).

Research on ethnic and racial identity thus far has contributed to multiple identities research in several ways. Biracial and bicultural identity development models have taken into account that individuals often identify with more than one racial or cultural heritage and have to negotiate between them (LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993; Poston, 1990). Research that focuses on distinguishing among the constructs of acculturation, ethnic identity, and racial identity has informed the identity development literature about multiple psychological processes. Jacob (1998) addressed the complexity of identity constructs and the interplay among the different aspects of race, ethnicity, and cultural adaptation in Asian Indian Americans. Jacob’s findings suggest that acculturation may influence the development of ethnic identity while neither of these constructs is predicted by racial identity; thus, these constructs are not synonymous. However, there should be caution in *only* considering ethnicity or race as identity issues for Asian Americans. There is a complexity in identity development beyond these variables, and focusing on them would limit an understanding of this diverse population.



Nonetheless, the research conducted thus far on ethnic identity and racial identity can serve as a basis for an expanded multiple identities model.

Increasingly, psychologists have noted that individuals often do not experience themselves in discrete categories of identity (Constantine, 2002; Greene, 2000; Parks, Carter, & Gushue, 1996; Reynolds & Pope, 1991; Robinson, 1999). Currently, psychological research mainly focuses on single aspects of identity that reflect social group membership, such as race and gender. Greene (2000) commented on the limitations of American psychology in which “identity is rarely viewed as an integrated whole in which one component can only be understood in relation to and in the context of others” (p. 2). Because psychological research follows this tendency of isolating social identities in empirical studies, psychotherapists are often influenced to operate similarly with their clients. For instance, Robinson (1999) noted that counselors may have difficulty viewing a client as “an integrated whole” because “when an identity status deviates from a normative standard, it tends to dominate and thus render invisible other equally viable components of a person’s identity” (p. 75). Robinson’s point speaks to the problem of concentrating only on the marginalized aspects of identity at the cost of considering other valid aspects of identity for the individual. Considering that salience of identity may vary for different individuals, it would be prudent for psychologists to explore their clients’ *subjective* (i.e., internal) experience of which aspect(s) of identity will be most relevant to the therapeutic process. Concomitantly, by addressing multiple identities within individuals, psychologists will be able to understand identity development processes in a more holistic manner.

A few theorists have conceptualized identity as a more complex construct and developed models that consider the intersection of multiple identities (Myers, Speight, Highlen, Cox, Reynolds, Adams, & Hanley, 1991; Reynolds & Pope, 1991). One example is the Multidimensional Identity Model, which proposes a framework of how individuals manage multiple oppressed identities (Reynolds & Pope, 1991). The Multidimensional Identity Model proposes that individuals may identify with one or more aspects of identity either passively or actively. On one hand, passively identifying with aspects of identity involves the individual allowing others – society, one's community, or family – to define her/his identity. On the other hand, actively identifying with aspects of identity entails the individual making a conscious choice of identification with social groups. To date, though, few studies have attempted to validate the Multidimensional Identity Model or other theoretical models. An exploratory qualitative study investigating the fit of the Multidimensional Identity Model with an Asian American sample has provided preliminary results addressing the validity of the model with this population (Chen & Guzmán, 2003). Further research building upon these findings would clarify the concepts of the model.

Although there has been no empirical research regarding theoretical models of multiple identities, some studies have investigated the intersection of some aspects of identity, such as gender and ethnicity. These studies explored the relationship between identity variables and other variables, such as narcissism, sexuality, and gender-role conflict (Kim, E. J., O'Neil, & Owen, 1996; Meston, Trapnell, & Gorzalka, 1996; Pittinsky, Shih, & Ambady, 1999; Smith, B. M., 1990). However, these studies are

problematic in that they utilized categorical membership (i.e., “Asians” compared with “Whites”) as variables and did not examine the participants’ *subjective* experience of group membership (e.g., ethnic or racial identity). Furthermore, these studies obfuscate race and ethnicity by considering the category “Asian” an ethnic group when it would be more accurate to consider it a multi-ethnic racial group. In sum, more research needs to be done in the area of multiple identities from the viewpoint of psychological processes and not merely that of demographic categorical variables.

The present study utilizes the Multidimensional Identity Model (Reynolds & Pope, 1991) as a conceptual framework for investigating multiple identities. The components of the model to be examined within an Asian American sample in this study include 1) salience of single or multiple aspects of identity and 2) passive (external sources determining group choice) versus active (conscious choice, internally defined) identification. The proposed study will specifically examine the following aspects of social identity: age, ethnicity, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic class. Additionally, this study will explore the intermingling of oppressed identity statuses (e.g., female, Asian American) with privileged identity statuses (e.g., male, heterosexual) by considering the relationships among the various aspects of identity (salient or not) – something the original Multidimensional Identity Model did not address. It is expected that ethnicity, race, and gender will be the most salient aspect of identity for many, but not all, Asian Americans since “visible” identity statuses are often in the forefront. However, it is also likely that, as theorized in the Multidimensional Identity Model, many individuals will identify with multiple aspects of identity and will

not be able to specify one aspect as most salient. The influence of societal perceptions on personal meaning (i.e., internal definitions) of social identities will also be examined.

The proposed study aims to clarify the concepts in the Multidimensional Identity Model regarding individual differences in self-identification. Additionally, recognition of *within-group* differences specifically in the Asian American population regarding psychological processes will aid researchers in conceptualizing Asian American identity more complexly. Data collected from the study will further inform the *process* of managing multiple aspects of identity and help guide future research in this area. The significance of this study for research and clinical application includes: 1) testing a model of managing multiple identities with Asian Americans; 2) exploring the salience of aspects of identity for Asian Americans; 3) understanding the influence of societal views on internal definitions of identity; and 4) creating an understanding of the need to conceptualize identity in a more sophisticated manner so that clinicians can work more effectively with Asian American clients.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter reviews the literature regarding identity development and factors in identity development. The section on identity development covers theory and research in the following areas: general identity development, clarification between race and ethnicity for Asian Americans, specific single identity development models (e.g., racial, ethnic, and sexual), and multiple identities. Factors to consider in identity development include the salience of various aspects of identity and internally defined versus externally defined identity. Existing research on Asian Americans is incorporated into these sections.

#### *Identity Development*

Identity development has been a major area of study in the field of psychology. Over the years, scholars have proposed and refined numerous theoretical models of identity development through research. This research has covered both personal and social identity issues. With the changing demographics of the United States, identity researchers have adapted their identity development models to reflect diversity in ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, and other aspects of identity. The development of these models and their application to the Asian American population are discussed in this section.

#### *Personal Identity and Social Identity as Foundational to Identity Development Models*

Both social context and personal meaning influence identity development.

Personal identity refers to qualities that make one feel unique. Brewer (2001) defined personal identity as “the individuated self – those characteristics that differentiate one individual from others within a given social context” (p. 246). Cross (1987) considered personal identity factors, such as self-esteem and self-worth, as “so-called universal components” that are found in all humans regardless of race, sex, social class, or culture. Personal identity, then, relates to personal characteristics, such as personality and self-esteem, and individual relationships.

Social identities, in contrast, are related to meaning associated with various group memberships. Social identities expand the meaning of identity beyond the individual in that they represent “categorizations of the self into more inclusive social units that *depersonalize* the self concept” (italics in original, Brewer 2001, p. 246). Cross (1987) provides the term “reference group orientation” in contrast to that of “personal identity.” Reference group orientation refers to group (or social) identity and includes race, culture, class, and gender specific components.

In distinguishing between personal identity (e.g., personality, self-esteem) and social group identity (e.g., ethnic background, religious affiliation), Phinney (1993) suggested that individuals have more choice in the expression of personal identity while they are more constrained by group norms and values in making choices regarding social group identity. While social identity and personal identity have often been defined as separate concepts of identity, some theorists argue that they are interrelated constructs in that personal identity is influenced by social group categories and social identities are often attached with personal meaning (Brewer, 2001; Deaux, 1993). This is seen in

Tajfel's (1974) definition of social identity, which he considered "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his [*sic*] knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the emotional significance attached to that membership" (p. 69). Thus, it is difficult to separate out personal identity from social identity. For the purposes of this dissertation, social identities will be defined as the incorporation of meanings associated with social group memberships into the personal self-concept. Before turning to identity development models regarding the formation of specific social identities (such as racial identity, ethnic identity, and sexual identity), some clarification is needed regarding how the terms "race" and "ethnicity" will be used in this dissertation.

#### *Race and Ethnicity in the Study of Asian American Identity*

Considering the ever-changing ethnic and racial demographics of the United States, interest in racial and ethnic identity formation in adolescent psychosocial and cognitive development research has increased over the years. The terms "race" and "ethnicity" are often used interchangeably in the research of psychological constructs, such as racial identity and ethnic identity, with little discussion on the intricate differences between the two (Jaret & Reitzes, 1999; Larkey & Hecht, 1995; Phinney, 1996; Yi & Shorter-Gooden, 1999). This is especially problematic for Asian Americans, as race and ethnicity are both significant concepts for identity development. The *racial* category of Asian Pacific Americans is a multi-ethnic group consisting of over twenty-five ethnic groups such as Indians, Koreans, Chinese, Filipinos, Vietnamese, and Laotians (Espiritu, 1992; Uba, 1994). There is no common language (except for English

perhaps) or culture that encompasses all (or even a majority of) these groups.

There are various definitions of ethnicity and ethnic groups. The common themes include a distinct grouping of people who share a historical and cultural heritage – which may include language, food, and art – and who distinguish themselves as different from other groups (Branch, 1999; Helms, 1996; Smedley, 1998). In contrast, race has been historically discussed as both a biological and a social construct in the social sciences. A biological definition of race is “an inbreeding, geographically isolated population that differs in distinguishable physical traits from other members of the species,” but since humans are social beings, “now the barriers that separate populations are political, cultural, and religious rather than geographic” (Zuckerman, 1998). Van den Berghe (1978, as cited in Card, 1999) made a succinct distinction between the terms “race” and “ethnicity” by defining them as such: race is “a group that is *socially* defined but on the basis of *physical* criteria” while ethnic groups are “socially defined but on the basis of *cultural* criteria” (italics in original, p. 259). Hence, both race and ethnicity are socially defined, yet they are based on different criteria, with racial categorization being more dependent than ethnic classification on institutional standards (e.g., laws regarding citizenship). Additionally, institutional standards continually change over time, and race has been defined on the basis of more than physical criteria, such as geographic origins.

One example of how the social construction of race superseded the biological definition of race was the classification of Asian Indians into the category of “Hindoos” (and subsequently as Asian Pacific Americans) even though technically they were of the “Caucasian race” (Takaki 1989). American citizenship was denied to Indian Americans



by the U.S. Supreme Court in *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind* (1923) – the reasoning was that “it was not enough to be ‘Caucasian’...it was also necessary to be ‘white’” (Zia, 2000). The ruling of the Supreme Court on this case reinforced that the dominant society and its institutional standards would determine the criteria upon which the elusive construct of race would be based.

Some psychological researchers argue that race should be subsumed under ethnicity (Phinney, 1996; Smith, E. J., 1991), and thus only ethnic identity needs to be discussed when talking about “multicultural” issues with ethnic groups. In contrast, Branch (1999) differentiates between race and ethnicity in that “race, as a category, may subsume several ethnic groups and in doing so, obliterates any uniqueness associated with more narrowly defined ethnic categories” (p. 7). The attempt to collapse ethnicity and race into one feature leads to confusion about the meanings of the constructs of ethnic identity and racial identity and often to an over-emphasis on cultural differences and a minimization of racism and oppression as influencing factors of identity formation. In Harrison’s (1998) review of literature on ethnicity and race in anthropology, she posits that ethnicity has become the “more politically appropriate intellectual category” to understand various sociocultural groups in a society (p. 613). This approach thus obscures the importance of race as a social construct and avoids addressing issues of racism. In a few instances, though, psychology researchers concur with Harrison’s argument and specifically point out the importance in differentiating between the two terms in that the aspects of *both* race and ethnicity need to be considered in identity research because they potentially play different roles in the lives of individuals

(Goodstein & Ponterotto, 1997; Helms & Talleyrand, 1997; Kibria, 2000; Thornton & White-Means, 2000).

This distinction between race and ethnicity is important to note because of the history of the formation of the racial category of “Asian Americans.” Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, ethnic groups originating from Asia were treated separately in U.S. policy and law. Initially, members of these ethnic groups practiced “ethnic disidentification” to distance themselves from other ethnic groups so as not to be blamed for others’ supposed “misdeeds” (Espiritu, 1992). One illustrative example of this “ethnic disidentification” is how Chinese Americans displayed signs in their stores declaring their Chinese ancestry (and loyalty to the U.S.) during World War II when Japanese Americans were being sent to internment camps. In this instance, Chinese Americans wanted to have no association with Japanese Americans lest they also be suspected of disloyalty to the nation.

After World War II, demographics of Asians in America changed, and a larger proportion of Asian Americans was U.S.-born and educated compared to previous generations. The Black Power movement of the 1960s helped initiate the Asian American civil rights movement (Espiritu, 1992). Following the change of immigration laws in 1965 and the ending of the Vietnam and Korean Wars, there was a wave of Asian immigration (from Southeast Asia, Taiwan, India, and South Korea) differing in demographics from previous immigrants from Asia (from China, Japan, and the Philippines). Thus, many Asian Americans today may identify more with their ethnic groups than with the broader racial category of “Asian Americans.” However, since

racial classification is so prominent in U.S. society, these individuals are likely also affected by the categorization of being “Asian American.”

In their discussion of racial and cultural minority identity development, Atkinson, Morten, and Sue (1998) noted that researchers and clinicians need to remember to look at within-group differences as individuals have varying experiences and may attribute different meanings to those experiences. The next section presents several identity models that address various within-group differences.

### *Single Social Identity Development Models*

Erik Erikson expanded Freud’s psychosexual development theory to be a *psychosocial* development theory where social context is taken into account as part of identity development (Erikson, 1966). The psychosocial development model encompasses the developmental processes and tasks that span the lifetime. Because Erikson emphasized the concept of the individual developing within a social context, many identity development models regarding social identities are based on psychosocial development theory. The aim of these identity development models was to theorize psychological processes related to social group memberships, especially regarding oppressed statuses (i.e., being a person of Color, gay/lesbian). A review of a few of these models is presented as they are the basis of multiple identities theories and provide useful theoretical constructs in conceptualizing identity development.

#### *Racial identity models.*

Racial identity models consider individual psychological processes regarding race, including the subjective experience of being a member of a racial group. These

models contrast with earlier models that drew assumptions from studying the demographic variable of “race.” An understanding of the origin of racial categorization in the United States is crucial as it helps illuminate the importance of studying internal psychic processes of individuals who are part of a society that classifies, identifies and labels them by race, which is often regarded as a dominant aspect of identity. Hence, the psychological concept of racial identity has been an important area of study in identity development research. Racial identity is defined as “psychological or internalized consequences of being socialized in a racially oppressive environment and the characteristics of self that develop in response to or in synchrony with either benefiting from or suffering under such oppression” (Helms, 1996). Initially, racial identity models were developed specifically for a Black population. However, Helms (1995) and Atkinson, Morten, & Sue (1998) expanded the understanding of racial identity development to apply to all people of Color.

Helms’s racial identity models are based on four themes: 1) identity develops in comparison to a “contrast” group; 2) healthy identity development requires the replacement of societal definitions of the racial self with a personally significant self-definition; 3) racial identity development is based on a sequential process which involves the maturation of the ego from earlier statuses to more sophisticated ones; and 4) identity development cannot be measured directly, so it can only be inferred from measures of the *expression* of racial identity statuses (Helms, 1996). The first two themes speak to the influence of social context on identity development in that the individual is developing a sense of self in relation to others on a group level. Not all identity theorists would agree

with the assumptions of the second and third themes that there is a specific healthy process of developing identity and that it follows a sequence of maturation (Cross, 1987). This issue of “healthy” identity development has not been resolved. It is unclear whether there are strong correlations between psychological variables (e.g., self-esteem and depression) and racial identity (Reynolds & Baluch, 2001). However, many studies have found *some* relationships between racial identity and psychosocial development (Pope, 2000), psychological distress (Neville & Lilly, 2000), and self-esteem (Goodstein & Ponterotto, 1997; Phelps, Taylor, & Gerard, 2001).

Helms’s (1995) People of Color Racial Identity model, which is based on Cross’s Nigrescence model (1971), consists of five statuses: conformity, dissonance, immersion/emersion, internalization, and integrative awareness. Many identity models resemble Helms’s racial identity models and even use similar terminology; thus, the characteristics of the different statuses are delineated here. Individuals in the *conformity* status are characterized by the rejection of their own racial group and their preferences for the dominant racial group (White Americans). Ambivalence or conflict about racial and cultural attitudes toward one’s own racial group and the White group characterize the status of *dissonance*. In the *immersion/emersion* status, individuals submerge themselves in and idealize their own race and culture while rejecting and holding negative attitudes about the dominant society. *Internalization* occurs when individuals have a positive attitude toward one’s own racial group, use internal criteria for racial self-definition, and have the capacity to assess and respond to members of the dominant racial group objectively. *Integrative awareness* is the status in which individuals value their own

group identity as well as recognizing similarities between themselves and members of other oppressed groups.

In contrast to the many studies on Black racial identity, only a handful of studies have been conducted on Asian Americans regarding racial identity (Alvarez, 1996; Alvarez & Helms, 2001; Carter & Constantine, 2000; Kim, J., 2001; Kohatsu, 1992; Kohatsu, Dulay, Lam, Concepcion, Perez, Lopez, & Euler, 2000; Pope, 2000). Most of the studies on Asian American racial identity are based on Helms's People of Color racial identity model, which has not been tested for construct validity with an Asian American sample.

There has been one racial identity model developed specifically for Asian Americans – the Asian American Identity Development model (Kim, J., 2001). The Asian American Identity Development model is based on J. Kim's (1981) doctoral dissertation data and addresses specific issues Asian Americans face in their racial identity development in recognition of different social and historical experiences compared to other people of Color. The model consists of five stages: 1) Ethnic Awareness; 2) White Identification; 3) Awakening to Social Political Consciousness; 4) Redirection to an Asian American Consciousness; and 5) Incorporation. All stages are situated within the sociocultural context of the shared experiences of Asian Americans: possessing the cultural trait of "group orientation" and being sensitive to others; and experiencing racism in dominant White society. The model differentiates between race and ethnicity but includes ethnic awareness as part of racial identity development in acknowledgment of their interrelatedness.

Generally, Asian American individuals initially identify with their family environment and thus are more aware of their ethnicity and cultural heritage and less aware of their racial categorization as “Asian Americans” (stage 1). As they enter school age (stage 2), they may become more aware that they are not White and may wish to be White or they may try to minimize their “Asian-ness” and not actually consciously acknowledge that they are not White. At some point (stage 3), some individuals become aware of White racism and become more socially and politically conscious, eventually focusing on Asian American issues in particular (stage 4). In the last stage (stage 5), individuals have confidence in being Asian American and are aware that other social identities beside racial identity are important to their self-concept.

Key concepts of the Asian American Identity Development model that are helpful in thinking about identity development include: some social identities involve awareness of social and political issues and context; it is a conscious process to identify racism and shed a negative self-identity; and racial identity interacts with other social identities, including ethnic identity which is a different psychological construct. These concepts are similar to those of Helms’s racial identity models. No further research has been done on Asian American racial identity using J. Kim’s Asian American Identity Development model.

Recently, an exploratory study on Asian Americans and racial identity by Chen et al. (2003) was conducted using the concepts outlined by Helms (1995) in her People of Color Racial Identity Model. The study investigated the construct validity of the People of Color Racial Identity Model(Helms, 1995) for 344 Asian Americans by looking at the

relationship between racial identity, color-blind racial attitudes, and racism-related stress. The methodology included a cluster analysis of the four racial identity statuses of conformity, dissonance, immersion/emersion, and internalization in order to form a more composite understanding of the relationship among racial identity status scores. The results indicated that the racial identity cluster exhibiting relatively low racial awareness may be adaptive for some Asian Americans as was evidenced by the low levels of racism-related stress. Furthermore, the racial identity clusters indicating more racial awareness and reflecting confusion about racial issues were related to more racism-related stress. Finally, the racial identity cluster exhibiting balance about racial issues was not necessarily related to more awareness of racism although it was related to low levels of racism-related stress. The results support some aspects of Helms's People of Color Racial Identity model but call into question the assumptions about psychological functioning associated with each stage (i.e., some "less mature" stages may actually be psychologically adaptive for Asian Americans).

With the changing demographics of the U.S. population, racial identity models have had to adapt to new issues, such as the increase of multi-racial individuals. The development of biracial identity models initiated the examination of how individuals manage more than one identity at a time. These models were created in response to the insufficiency of existing racial identity models in reflecting the complexity of biracial or multiracial identity developmental processes (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995; Poston, 1990). Multi-racial individuals may feel pressured by their parents or society to choose between their parents' racial heritage; they may decide to choose only one racial heritage with



which to identify; and they may decide to integrate their multiple racial heritages into their identity. Their experiences are often characterized by feeling out of place and not quite belonging to any racial community. Kerwin and Ponterotto (1995) acknowledged that contextual factors, such as personal, societal and environmental factors, do indeed affect the identity development process and recommended that those factors be considered in future research. Hence, more research needs to be done to address these complex issues. In effect, the development of multiple identities models occurred in response to these biracial identity models.

The forces of prejudice, discrimination, and racism affect people of Color *and* White people, and racial identity models help address the psychological concerns that may arise as a result of the racial climate. Unlike ethnic identity models though, racial identity models do not account for many cultural components, such as a sense of belonging and cultural behaviors.

#### *Ethnic identity models.*

The ethnic identity development model most researched and discussed is that proposed by Phinney (1989). Phinney's model is based on Marcia's (1966) ego identity model, which was created to understand and explain the developmental process of adolescents. Phinney's ethnic identity development model (1989) includes three distinct stages: diffusion/foreclosure, moratorium, and ethnic identity achievement. In the *diffusion/foreclosure stage*, the individual has not explored ethnic issues, lacks interest in them (diffusion), and holds attitudes about one's ethnicity derived from others (foreclosure). The *moratorium stage* is characterized by becoming conflicted about one's

ethnicity and the beginning of an ethnic identity search. The “ideal outcome” of the ethnic identity development process is to reach the *ethnic identity achievement stage*, in which individuals have accepted and internalized their ethnicity. According to Phinney (1989), an achieved ethnic identity is related to a more positive self-concept, increased self-confidence, and higher self-esteem.

Current research on ethnic identity demonstrates the importance of considering ethnic identity as just part of a more complex identity. Goodstein & Ponterotto (1997) reported that ethnic identity and racial identity were differentially predictive of self-esteem for 126 Black and 292 White college students, in that while both ethnic identity and racial identity were related to self-esteem for Black students, only ethnic identity and not racial identity was related to self-esteem for White students. In this study, Phinney’s Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (1990) was used to measure ethnic identity, and the Racial Identity Attitudes Scale (Parham & Helms, 1981, as cited in Goodstein & Ponterotto, 1997) and the White Racial Identity Attitudes Scale (Helms & Carter, 1990) were used to measure racial identity. The results indicated that racial identity and ethnic identity have different relationships with psychological functioning for different racial and ethnic groups, and thus both should be considered when investigating identity development.

Lee (2003) reported that while ethnic identity and other-group orientation – both measured by Phinney’s Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (1990) – did not correlate with psychological distress for Asian American students, they did correlate with personal and social well-being. Lee concluded that ethnic identity “does not moderate or mediate

the negative psychological effects of personal ethnic discrimination or minority group discrimination” (p. 139). Thus, ethnic identity by itself may not be a sufficient indicator of Asian Americans’ experiences with discrimination. Yeh and Hwang’s (2000), based on their conceptualization of ethnic identity from an interdependent perspective, recommended that clinicians consider the context of the individual’s experiences as well as interactions with other aspects of identity, such as gender role and racial identity.

Current theory and research on ethnic identity points to the importance of considering multiple aspects of identity in conjunction with ethnicity – including an understanding of individuals’ experiences and psychological functioning. Ethnic identity is only one part of conceptualizing the complex experiences and identities of Asian Americans.

#### *Sexual identity models.*

The majority of theory and research on sexual identity focuses on minority sexual identity development, such as that of lesbian and gay individuals (Worthington, Savoy, Dillon, & Vernaglia, 2002). Most research on heterosexual individuals regards sexual attitudes and behavior without exploring the development of sexual identity (one exception is Eliason, 1995). However, more recently, scholars have identified the need to examine heterosexual identity in a similar fashion that Helms (1995) and Carter (1997) have suggested White racial identity needed to be investigated (Mohr, 2002; Worthington et al., 2002). Not only is it important to consider the experiences of marginalized groups (racial or sexual); it is imperative that the experiences of dominant groups be examined. Without this scrutiny, the notion is perpetuated that the dominant is “normal” and needs

no examination, while the marginalized is forever “other” and needs continual study. In this section, theory and research on sexual identity for lesbian, gay, and heterosexual individuals are presented. Their connection with and role in multiple identities theory and research are also discussed.

An often cited model of lesbian/gay identity development is Cass’s (1979) model of Homosexual Identity Formation, which has been the foundation of many other models of gay/lesbian identity development (McCarn & Fassinger, 1996). Unlike Phinney’s (1989) ethnic identity model that is based on Marcia’s (1966) ego identity model, Cass’s (1979) Homosexual Identity Formation model is based on interpersonal congruency theory. According to interpersonal congruence theory, the individual aims to achieve cognitive and affective congruency among his/her self-perception, her/his behavior, and the perception of others. Cass outlines six stages of homosexual identity formation: *identity confusion*, *identity comparison*, *identity tolerance*, *identity acceptance*, *identity pride*, and *identity synthesis*. The individual starts off feeling confused about her/his sexual orientation and works through a process of becoming aware of incongruencies in perception and behavior, resolving those incongruencies (to some extent), and accepting and becoming proud to identify as gay or lesbian. Cass (1979) cautioned that her theoretical model on Homosexual Identity Formation should be considered only as a “broad guideline for understanding how an individual comes to adopt a homosexual identity” (p. 235). Individual variation and sociocultural context need to be taken into account when applying this model to understand specific individuals and situations. Cass (1984) tested this model empirically and found support for the framework of homosexual

identity formation. Nevertheless, McCarn and Fassinger (1996) point out the model's limited usefulness in current research, such as the overemphasis of political awareness in the conceptualization of identity synthesis and the development of the model based on an Australian sample.

In an attempt to address the limitations of extant models of lesbian/gay identity development, McCarn and Fassinger (1996) and Fassinger and Miller (1996) proposed models delineating both individual and social aspects of sexual minority identity development. Their models were built upon existing lesbian/gay identity development models as well as racial and ethnic identity development models. The proposed models for Sexual Minority Identity Formation (Fassinger & Miller, 1996; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996) addressed social group identity in addition to individual sexual identity development in four phases: 1) awareness, 2) exploration, 3) deepening/commitment, and 4) internalization/synthesis. It was argued that identity development involved a process that was "continuous and circular; every new relationship raises new issues about individual sexuality, and every new context requires renewed awareness of group oppression" (McCarn & Fassinger, 1996, p. 522). In this manner, individual sexual identity development was conceptualized in relation to social identity. This concept was based on racial and ethnic identity models, so it takes into consideration attitudes toward other lesbians/gays and attitudes toward heterosexuals. These models removed the emphasis in other models on political awareness and disclosure of being lesbian/gay as part of lesbian/gay identity development.

Only recently have researchers begun theorizing and researching heterosexual

identity development (Eliason, 1995; Mohr, 2002; Sullivan, 1998; Worthington et al., 2002). Worthington et al. (2002) provided a review of existing literature on heterosexual identity development and proposed a model of heterosexual identity development that addressed aspects of sexual identity in addition to sexual orientation for “heterosexually-identified individuals.” Heterosexual identity development is defined as “the individual and social processes by which heterosexually identified persons acknowledge and define their sexual needs, values, sexual orientation and preferences for sexual activities, modes of sexual expression, and characteristics of sexual partners” (Worthington et al., 2002, p. 510). The Multidimensional Model of Heterosexual Identity Development (Worthington et al., 2002) is based on several other identity development models (Downing & Roush, 1985; Helms, 1995; Sullivan, 1998) and consists of five identity statuses: unexplored commitment, active exploration (goal directed, excludes “naïve behavioral experimentation”), diffusion (no commitment or exploration), deepening and commitment, and synthesis (congruence of individual identity and integration with other social identities). They indicated that this model should be considered within a biopsychosocial context, including the cultures of gender, ethnicity, and religion. However, Gilbert and Rader (2002) critiqued Worthington et al.’s model for not examining the intersection of gender and sexual identities more closely. Thus, even though Worthington and his colleagues conceptualized heterosexual identity development as a complex process influenced by and influencing other social identities, more theoretical development of this contextual perspective is needed.

Although there has been increased discussion about sexuality in Asian Americans

in the humanities, there are few empirical studies in psychology on the sexual identity of Asian Americans (Okazaki, 2002). The studies on Asian Americans have mainly examined sexual attitudes and behavior and not sexual identity development (Chng & Geliga-Vargas, 2000; Cochran, Mays, & Leung, 1991; Huang & Uba, 1992; Meston, Trapnell, & Gorzalka, 1996). Additionally, in most of these studies, the constructs of ethnic culture and race were investigated by the demographic categories of ethnic background and immigration status and not from a subjective perspective (i.e., ethnic identity and racial identity).

Even though most of the literature on sexual identity development in Asian Americans is exploratory or theoretical in nature, scholars have begun to take into account the intersection of sexual identity (including sexual orientation) with ethnic identity and/or racial identity (Chan, C. S., 1989; Chao, 2001; Chung & Katayama, 1998). Chan's (1989) qualitative study on identity development for Asian American lesbians and gay men has been the foundation for understanding the interaction between racial identity and sexual identity in Asian Americans. In her research, Chan (1989) surveyed 19 Asian American lesbians and 16 Asian American gay men and reported that 57% felt more comfortable in the lesbian/gay community, 29% felt more comfortable in the Asian American community, and 14% felt more comfortable in neither or both. Participants were asked to choose one aspect of identity over the other (either Asian American or gay/lesbian), but 20% responded that they could not choose one over the other as both were integrated into their identity.

In describing the identity development of Asian American gay and lesbian

adolescents, Chung and Katayama (1998) recommended that the interaction between ethnic identity development and sexual identity development be considered since Asian American gay and lesbian adolescents were dealing with a “double-minority” status. (Although the authors used the term “ethnic identity,” the concepts they discussed included racial identity issues as conceptualized by Helms (1995). For the purposes of this discussion, the authors’ original terminology will be used with the understanding that it blends the concepts of ethnic identity and racial identity.) They noted the parallel processes of ethnic identity and lesbian/gay identity, which include accepting one’s culture/sexual orientation and that of others, understanding discrimination, and integrating each identity with other social identities (Chung & Katayama, 1998). Their theory has yet to be tested empirically, but there seems to be growing support for their conceptualization of interaction among aspects of identity development. In fact, the increased discussion about multiple identities in psychology has largely been informed and driven by scholars interested in investigating the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered people of Color (Akerlund & Cheung, 2000; Chan, C. S., 1989; Chung & Katayama, 1998; Fukuyama & Ferguson, 2000; Greene, 2000; Lowe & Mascher, 2001). A more extensive discussion is presented in the literature review of multiple identities in a later section.

*Other aspects of identity development.*

Other aspects of identity, namely religion, gender, and socioeconomic class, have not been considered in the same type of developmental manner as race, ethnicity, and sexuality have been. However, some studies have explored the impact of religious



affiliation and socioeconomic class on identity (Carter & Helms, 1988; Kiely, 1997; Markstrom-Adams & Smith, 1996). There is also a large field of research regarding gender roles and feminist identity (Downing & Roush, 1985; Liss, O'Connor, Morosky, & Crawford, 2001; Wastell, 1996). A few of these studies have included Asian American samples and will be elaborated on in this section (Alarcon, 1997; Asher, 2002; Chua & Fujino, 1999; Kim, E. J., O'Neil, & Owen, 1996; Liang & Sedlacek, 2003).

In the field of psychology, the role of religion in the lives of individuals is often thought of in terms of behavior, attitudes, and well-being and not as part of identity development (Genia, 2001; Markstrom-Adams & Smith, 1996; Piedmont, 1999). One exception is a study conducted by Markstrom-Adams and M. Smith (1996), who investigated the connection between religious orientation and ego-identity development. They conducted two studies examining the relationship between religious orientation (extrinsic, intrinsic, nonreligious, or non-discriminate) and ego-identity development in 187 high school students in the United States and Canada. In one study, the participants were 38 Mormon and 47 non-Mormon students living in a predominantly Mormon community. In the second study, 102 Jewish students living in Ontario, Canada participated. The relationship between religious orientation and ethnic identity was also investigated in the second study. Based on the results, Markstrom-Adams and M. Smith concluded that individuals who had a more extrinsic motivation toward religion were more likely to be characterized in the diffusion status (uncommitted and not exploring identity) of psychosocial development, and thus less mature in their identity formation. Those individuals who had an intrinsic motivation toward religion had lower diffusion

scores, and thus were considered “not psychosocially immature.” In study two, the individuals with intrinsic motivation toward religion and those with non-discriminate pro-religious attitudes scored higher on ethnic and ideological identity achievement. The study concluded that ethnic identity plays a significant role in Jewish religious orientation, such that those more involved in their Jewish faith also identify more strongly with their ethnicity. Additionally, Piedmont (1999) advocated for a more inclusive examination of religion and spirituality within psychological research. More specifically, identity research needs to incorporate the traditionally understudied aspects of religion and spirituality. In Liang and Sedlacek’s (2003) study of the needs of Asian American college students, 417 first-year Asian American college students were surveyed regarding their attitudes, expectations, and interests. Through a factor analysis, Liang and Sedlacek (2003) identified beliefs about religion as an important factor to consider in Asian American college students’ adjustment to college. The study concluded that college student affairs and services needed to take into consideration the role of religion in Asian Americans’ experiences, especially how religion relates to ethnic identity.

Psychological literature regarding gender includes topics such as gender roles, gender role conflict, feminist identity, and womanist identity. Several scholars have examined the intersection of gender roles and ethnic identity/acculturation for Asian Americans (Chua & Fujino, 1999; Kim, E. J., O’Neil, & Owen, 1996; Sue, 2001). More recently, interest in the universality of womanist identity theory for women of all racial and ethnic backgrounds has sparked numerous empirical studies, although many of them

are unpublished dissertation studies (Alarcon, 1997; Banks-Wallace, 2000; Kiely, 1997; Ossana, Helms, & Leonard, 1992; Parks, Carter, & Gushue, 1996; Roberts, 2001). The womanist perspective is important to mention as it addresses the unique intersection of racial and gender identities for African American women. Helms borrowed the term “womanist” for her psychological womanist identity model (1990, as cited in Ossana, Helms, & Leonard, 1992). Although the womanist identity model draws from Black feminist thought on womanism, Helms’s model does not specifically address the intersection between race and gender for women of Color. With the intent of the model being inclusive of women of all ethnic and racial backgrounds, Helms proposed a model of “healthy” gender identity development for women in terms similar to her Black Racial Identity Model (Helms, 1990). Helms’s model differs from the Feminist Identity Model (Downing & Roush, 1985) in that it focuses on an internally defined identity rather than an externally defined one. She also constructed a scale, the Womanist Identity Attitudes Scale, to measure womanist identity development.

Many researchers have investigated the validity of Helms’s Womanist Identity Attitudes Scale with women of Color (Alarcon, 1997; Banks-Wallace, 2000; Ossana, Helms, & Leonard, 1992; Parks, Carter, & Gushue, 1996; Roberts, 2001). Alarcon’s (1997) study of gender identity, acculturation, cultural (ethnic) identity, and self-esteem for 74 Asian American women (mostly of Chinese and Filipino descent) found a positive correlation between the internalization stage (positively internally defined sense of womanhood) of womanist identity and the integration stage (combining ethnic cultural values with Western values) of cultural identity. However, the Cronbach’s alpha was

reported to be “marginally acceptable” for research purposes for the Internalization scale of the Womanist Identity Attitudes Scale. The focus of Alarcon’s study was predicting self-esteem based on womanist identity, cultural identity, and acculturation. The study did not examine the womanist identity model or attitudes scale critically in terms of fit with Asian American women. Thus, it is difficult to determine the applicability of this study to Asian American women. Furthermore, there was no exploration of the relationship between gender identity and cultural identity – something that would have enhanced the conclusions of the study.

In a more recent study of the womanist identity model with 193 Asian American women, Roberts (2001) investigated the validity of the model and, through a confirmatory factor analysis, found it lacked a goodness of fit. Based on these results, Roberts questioned the supposed racial inclusiveness of Helms’s model to be universal and commented on the few published studies on the validity of the Womanist Identity Attitudes Scale. Thus, on one hand, it is possible that the scale does not reflect the constructs of the womanist identity model and has questionable validity. On the other hand, even if the Womanist Identity Attitudes Scale does reflect the concepts of the womanist identity model, the theoretical model does not fit well with Asian American women. Either way, the womanist identity model has yet to be established as suitable for conceptualizing gender identity in Asian American women.

Just as race and ethnicity used to be treated as external factors in psychological research, socioeconomic class is still mostly discussed as part of the environmental context or as a demographic variable that is an external factor influencing self-concept.

Studying socioeconomic class has been tricky since class is a continuous variable and not clearly delineated in the United States. Socioeconomic class comprises more than the issue of money – it also includes power and prestige thus making it a more complex issue than it is usually regarded (Fouad & Brown, 2000; Russell, 1996). Russell (1996) discussed how class influences identity for poor and working classes in terms of internalized oppression – integrating their experiences as members of marginalized groups into their self-identity. Dealing with “systematically negative social conditions” can affect how individuals think about themselves personally and socially in addition to how they develop as individuals. This is not to say that socioeconomic class does not have an impact on those with middle and upper class backgrounds; however, the salience of class may be less dramatic for them because they experience less “systematically negative social conditions.”

The influence of class on identity is also related to gender, ethnic, sexual, and racial identities (Asher, 2002; Louie, 2001; Russell, 1996; Weber, 1996). The studies on social class and Asian Americans have mostly focused on the influence of social class values and ethnic identity on career decisions (Asher, 2002; Louie, 2001). For instance, Asher’s (2002) qualitative study of 10 Indian American high school students revealed that parents’ immigrant status and cultural expectations affected the messages that the students received about which careers were acceptable (i.e., professional, high-paying jobs). In the study’s interviews, the theme of the model minority emerged, especially regarding the intersection of class and race. A limitation of the study is the small sample and the difficulties Asher had in obtaining samples from public, “comprehensive” schools

(i.e., not specializing in particular topics, like science and math), which may have limited her access to within-group diversity in terms of social class and immigration status. Because of this, Asher (2002) suggested that in order to investigate the relationship among race, class, and ethnicity more fully, future studies need to utilize a sample more representative of the diverse experiences of Indian Americans and Asian Americans in general.

The next section elaborates on theory and research regarding the topic of multiple social identities and how they are managed.

#### *Multiple Social Identities and Development*

Identity development models regarding single aspects of social identity, such as ethnicity, race, or sexuality, do not take into consideration the intersection or salience of that aspect of identity relative to other aspects of identity (Cass, 1979; Helms, 1995; Phinney, 1989). Several models include comments on the importance of considering context and relationship with other aspects of identity though (Helms, 1995; Worthington et al., 2002). However, few theoretical models address the issue of multiple social identities directly. There are studies that have used multiple demographic categories as variables, such as “gender and ethnicity,” to examine psychological and behavioral differences (Martinez & Dukes, 1991; Meston, Trapnell, & Gorzalka, 1996). These studies are limited, though, because the *subjective experiences* of the intersection of those social group memberships are not usually explored. The integration of various aspects of identity into the self-concept, the topic of this dissertation, is important to consider, especially among individuals who are members of multiple oppressed groups (Greene,

2000; Lowe & Mascher, 2001; Reynolds & Pope, 1991). This section presents extant theories and research regarding multiple identities, including those more specifically focusing on multiple oppressions.

Having multiple oppressed identity statuses can be difficult to manage, amplify issues of oppression and discrimination, and cause feelings of conflict within an individual in terms of identity development. According to Greene (2000), gay, lesbian, and bisexual people of Color can feel marginalized by their gay, lesbian, and bisexual community and/or their racial and cultural community. Similarly, hooks (1995) described the challenges of Black women advocating for feminist causes in that they may be viewed as betraying their race by criticizing their “Black brothers” or as accepting patriarchal and misogynistic attitudes by keeping silent about women’s rights. In addition, multiple oppressions are often overlooked in psychology as research tends to focus on one aspect of identity (e.g., being gay, lesbian, or bisexual) to the neglect of other aspects of identity (e.g., being a woman and/or person of Color). In Greene’s (2000) review of lesbian and gay psychology, she detailed its “omissions of diversity” regarding age, sexuality (e.g., bisexuality), class, ethnicity and race. She described many individuals dealing with “multiple stigma,” who felt they had to compartmentalize their identities or hide aspects of identity in order to be accepted into one community or another. Thus, managing multiple aspects of identity can create conflict within individuals. More research is needed regarding the nature of such conflicts and the manner in which individuals manage them.

With the intent of expanding beyond racial identity development models,

Atkinson, Morten, & Sue (1998) proposed the Minority Identity Development model (initially developed in 1983), which is based on Helms's People of Color Racial Identity model. The Minority Identity Development model addresses the shared experience of oppression of various minority (i.e., marginalized) groups and includes five stages, which are similar to those of Helms's People of Color Racial Identity model: conformity, dissonance, resistance and immersion, introspection, and synergetic articulation and awareness. Attitudes considered in all stages are attitudes toward self, attitudes toward others of the same minority, attitudes toward others of a different minority, and attitudes toward the dominant group. Although referenced often in the literature, the construct validity of the Minority Identity Development model has not been demonstrated. Furthermore, even though the model addresses other marginalized groups beyond race and ethnicity, it does not address to the interaction among these social identities (Myers et al., 1991).

The Optimal Theory Applied to Identity Development model is a holistic approach to identity development (Myers et al., 1991). This model also closely parallels Helms's racial identity models and is conceptualized under the umbrella of a universal spiritual worldview. The seven phases include: phase 0 – absence of conscious awareness; phase 1 – individuation; phase 2 – dissonance; phase 3 – immersion; phase 4 – internalization; phase 5 – integration; and phase 6 – transformation. Development is characterized by the drive to gain self-knowledge as a “spiritual-material” being (optimal theory). The model considers identity as a whole within a sociocultural context without compartmentalizing individual aspects of identity, such as sex, race, and sexual



orientation. In this way, the model points out the importance of recognizing that individuals have multiple identities. However, the Optimal Theory Applied to Identity Development model does not theorize how multiple identities are managed by individuals.

In contrast to identity models tracing a developmental process, the Multidimensional Identity Model (Reynolds & Pope, 1991) considers how individuals *manage* multiple identities. Drawing on biracial identity development models that address the intersection of multiple identities, Reynolds and Pope (1991) developed the Multidimensional Identity Model as a categorical identity model. This model is based on the reality that individuals often experience multiple oppressions because of their various social group statuses, such as being a woman and a person of Color. The four categories of identity resolution for individuals with multiple oppressed identity statuses are: 1) identification with one aspect of self (passive acceptance of societal definition); 2) identification with one aspect of self (conscious self-identification); 3) identification with multiple aspects of self in a segmented fashion; and 4) identification with combined multiple aspects of self. Although the Multidimensional Identity Model does not explicitly define it in these terms, two dimensions can be drawn out of this model – 1) the number of aspects of identity with which individuals identify (single aspect versus multiple aspects of identity) and 2) societal identification (passive acceptance) versus personal identification (conscious choice) with aspects of identity.

In recognition of the interpersonal component of identity development, Phinney (1993) examined the management of multiple identities in minority youth (i.e.,

adolescents of Color). Her review of research on the integration of multiple identities (mostly regarding personal identity at the individual level) indicated that adolescents can manage multiple social identities in the following ways: 1) having a fragmented identity – separating different group identities depending on the situation; 2) creating a hierarchy of identities – determining personal values of how “salient” one reference group is over another (i.e., having a master identity that organizes a hierarchy of identities); and 3) achieving differentiation and integration of identities (Phinney, 1993). These concepts are similar to those proposed in the Multidimensional Identity Model (Reynolds & Pope, 1991), which was not included in Phinney’s review of research.

Phinney examined her own research data on minority youth to investigate these concepts – initially researched with personal identities – with social group identities. Because the data were not collected specifically for examining multiple group identities, her analysis is exploratory in nature. Based on her preliminary qualitative analysis, Phinney (1993) suggested that managing multiple identities is a developmental process in which adolescents begin with concrete, dualistic thinking and through maturation reach the level of abstract, integrated thinking in which the complexity of identity across contexts is understood. She noted that integration of identities may increase internal conflict, though, if social group values are in opposition to one another. On the other hand, at this sophisticated level of cognition, Phinney observed, adolescents may also have increased tolerance for ambiguity and be able to handle contradictory messages. To date, Phinney’s research in this area has focused on managing multiple *cultural* identities and has yet to expand to include other social identities. Her preliminary investigation and

review of research support the theoretical framework of the Multidimensional Identity Model (Reynolds & Pope, 1991) and point to the need of further research in clarifying the process of managing multiple identities.

One study utilizing both the Optimal Theory Applied to Identity Development model and the Multidimensional Identity Model as theoretical frameworks for analysis is Finley's (1997) qualitative dissertation study. In this study, six women of diverse backgrounds were interviewed regarding the development of multiple identities, including more than one oppressed identity status. Finley (1997) concluded that the Optimal Theory Applied to Identity Development model by itself was not sufficient in capturing the complexities of multiple identity development. However, she suggested that the combined use of the Multidimensional Identity Model with the Optimal Theory Applied to Identity Development model can help in understanding the nuances of multiple identity development. For instance, two categories of the Multidimensional Identity Model, passive acceptance and combined multiple identities, were evident in various phases of the identity development process in the Optimal Theory Applied to Identity Development model. Passive acceptance of societal definitions of identity was seen in the beginning phases of identity development while combined multiple identities were observed in later phases of the Optimal Theory Applied to Identity Development model.

Crawford, Allison, Zamboni, and Soto (2002) found that the intersection of racial and sexual identities was considered as having a significant impact on identity development for a sample of 174 African American gay and bisexual men. The study's

results indicated that those men who have integrated both their “racial-ethnic” identity and sexual identity into their self-definition are more likely to experience higher life satisfaction and self-esteem than those who felt unable to be a part of either the African American community or gay/lesbian/bisexual community. In this manner, considering multiple aspects of their identity was important in understanding the personal meaning of their social identities.

In Chao’s (2001) dissertation study on 35 heterosexual and 30 lesbian Asian American women, she compared the two groups in terms of self-esteem, self-concept, and coping strategies. She examined all participants’ level of acculturation, self-esteem, and self-concept; however, she included a sexual identity questionnaire (based on Chan’s 1989 study) only for the lesbian women. The results indicated no difference in self-esteem between the heterosexual and lesbian women. Sexual orientation categorization was used as an independent variable, though, to measure if it was a function of self-concept in combination with acculturation. The findings revealed differences between the two groups in self-concept depended on level of acculturation but not “sexual identity” (i.e., sexual orientation). Based on those results, Chao (2001) suggested that acculturation has more of an impact on self-concept than sexual identity does, but it is difficult to draw strong conclusions based on such a small sample. Additionally, because the study did not examine sexual identity for the heterosexual participants, the interaction between acculturation and sexual identity could not be examined fully, and thus Chao’s interpretation was not fully informed. In her study, the terms “sexual identity” and “sexual orientation” were used interchangeably, so their relationship with other variables

was unclear. This distinction should be made however, as “sexual orientation” usually refers to a category while “sexual identity” can reflect a more complex, psychological process (Worthington et al., 2002).

In the qualitative portion of Chao’s (2001) study, the lesbian participants were asked about how they managed multiple oppressions (“triple oppressions”) – being Asian American, a woman, and a lesbian. There was no parallel question for the heterosexual participants regarding the management of multiple identities and oppressions – they were asked how they fused their Asian and American identities. Strangely, their identities as women and heterosexual individuals were not considered. The methodology of Chao’s (2001) study points to the tendency to normalize dominant privileged aspects of identity by not investigating their significance in individuals’ lives. In this case, the privilege of heterosexuality overshadowed the consideration of the “double oppression” of being Asian American women. Limitations aside, Chao’s study addressed the need to consider the complexity of identity for Asian Americans by recognizing that multiple aspects of identity are involved in the process of identity development.

The studies discussed in this section provide preliminary evidence that there needs to be continued study of the intersection of multiple identities in the field of identity development. The interaction of sexual, racial, gender and ethnic identities has been explored for Asian Americans, but there has been little consideration of their relationship with other aspects of identity, such as religion, socioeconomic status, and age. Since identity development involves numerous aspects of identity, the current study proposes to explore the intersection of multiple aspects of identity in Asian Americans in

order to gain a more holistic understanding of social identities in this population.

### *Factors in Identity Development*

Identity development has traditionally been conceptualized in singular categories (e.g., racial identity, ethnic identity, and sexual identity) and as an internal psychological process. Increasingly, identity development scholars are recognizing other factors in identity development, namely identity salience and internal definition versus external definition of identity. This next section discusses the salience of identity especially regarding multiple identities and the internal and external processes of identity development.

### *Salience of Various Aspects of Identity*

Research on Asian Americans has assumed ethnicity or race as the most significant, or salient, aspect of identity. This assumption is based on the recognition that people of Color have been psychologically impacted by the oppression of racial and ethnic groups in the United States. Also, people tend to focus on the most visible characteristics, usually regarding race and sex. However, this limits our understanding of identity development in Asian Americans because it does not taken into consideration the diversity within the group in terms of class, sex, religion, age, and sexual orientation. Furthermore, individual differences in salience of different aspects of identity may exist (Fouad & Brown, 2000; Rotheram & Phinney, 1987).

Although race is “a salient collective identity” for many people of Color (Helms, 1994), this may not always be the case for Asian Americans because of the “model minority myth.” This dubious distinction pits Asian Americans against other visible

ethnic and racial minority groups and encourages them to strive toward becoming as close to the White ideal as possible. Hence, it may be easier for Asian Americans to disregard racial discrimination when given the opportunity to live the privileged life of being the “exception” of racial and ethnic minority groups. In other words, Asian Americans are often rewarded by dominant society for *not* identifying as being part of an oppressed group (Ancheta, 1998). Another reason that race may not be as salient for Asian Americans is that many White Americans buy into the “model minority myth” and may be more tolerant of and less (overtly) discriminatory towards Asian Americans such that Asian Americans do not perceive racial discrimination as being a major issue in their lives. Thus, their racial identity may not be the most salient aspect of their identity.

A couple of theoretical frameworks regarding salience of identity have been found in the literature (Ethier & Deaux, 2001; Fouad & Brown, 2000). Ethier and Deaux (2001) outlined three bases of influence of salience on social identity: 1) having “chronic levels of group identification” makes it more likely that the individual will experience that identity as salient, independent of the situational context; 2) the more contrast between the individual’s self-definition and the current context, such as having minority status, makes that identity more salient; and 3) the more contrast between the individual’s past background (e.g., ethnic composition of neighborhood) and the current context (e.g., university community) makes that identity more salient (p. 255-256). Similarly, Rotheram and Phinney (1987) suggested that identity salience depended on minority versus majority status such that an aspect of identity (e.g., race) was more salient when the individual was in the minority of being part of the associated social group in a

particular context.

In order to address the differing levels of salience of various aspects of identity in individuals, Fouad and Brown (2000) proposed the concept of differential status identity. They defined differential status identity as “the identity derived from social standing differences from the ordinant group,” with the ordinant group being dominant or privileged in society, such as being White and male (Fouad & Brown, 2000, p. 387). Thus, individuals develop their identity based on their real and perceived differences in social standing with the social referent group (i.e., those with dominant status). According to this conceptualization of differential status identity, the more difference perceived between one’s social standing and the social referent group, the more likely that particular aspect of identity would be salient in the individual’s identity.

In their discussion on vocational development research, Worthington and Juntunen (1997) commented on the influence of social group salience. They asserted that members of dominant social groups were less likely than members of oppressed social groups to attribute their experiences to their social group memberships. Thus, the concept of “group membership salience” refers to the degree to which individuals consider group memberships salient to their identity, with oppressed social group statuses being more likely to be salient than dominant social group statuses (Worthington & Juntunen, 1997). This is similar to McIntosh’s (2001) suggestion that oppressed identity statuses are more salient than privileged identity statuses since privilege is often invisible and not consciously acknowledged. However, this viewpoint has not been empirically tested. Besides, there may be reason to believe that there is variation within oppressed



social groups regarding salience of their “oppressed” social identity.

Racial identity researchers have long recognized within-group variation regarding racial identity statuses. However, instead of focusing only on racial identity, they are beginning to consider that the within-racial group differences that are found in racial identity studies may point to differing salience levels of race *in addition to* differing racial identity statuses (Fouad & Brown, 2000; Worthington & Juntunen, 1997). In other words, individuals of a racial group may differ in measures of psychological functioning based on salience of race as well as – or perhaps, opposed to – based on racial identity status, which does not account for salience of race in the lives of individuals. Robinson (1999) strongly cautions against making assumptions about clients’ problems based on their seemingly “oppressed” group statuses. She argues that a premature “diagnosis of oppression based on the presence of melanin and a limp [with regard to a disability presented in a case example of a Latino man], and the absence of heterosexist markings regarding normal adult development (e.g., a spouse and children) is both wrong and unethical” (p. 77). Instead, the client should be considered as having “multiple and textured identities” without assuming that “oppressed” group statuses have caused distress or are at the root of their problems (Robinson, 1999). One qualitative study that explored the “interplay between privilege and oppression” reported a bidirectional relationship between privileged and oppressed statuses such that they can and do affect one another (Croteau, Talbot, Lance, & Evans, 2002). For instance, one theme that emerged was how “privilege affected participants’ recognition of their own oppression” in that some White heterosexual women had no trouble focusing on their privilege but

“struggled” to discuss their oppression as women (Croteau et al., 2002, p. 246). Thus, the relationship between privilege and oppressed statuses is more complex than the previous assumption that oppressed statuses overshadow one’s privileged statuses and, thus, are more salient in their identity.

Jacob’s (1998) dissertation study investigated the salience of various identity factors for Asian Indians – acculturation, ethnic identity, and racial identity. In this study, 93 individuals of Asian Indian descent (56 female, 37 male) completed instruments measuring the constructs of acculturation, ethnic identity, and racial identity. Data analyses included structural equation modeling which tested the interaction among the variables. The results of Jacob’s study indicate that racial identity was not a salient factor for this sample of Asian Indians while acculturation and ethnic identity were. However, Jacob mentions some limitations of these findings: 1) the sample consisted mostly of first generation Asian Indians (69%) which may account for acculturation and ethnic identity being more salient than racial identity (a specifically U.S. sociopolitical concept); 2) the instrument used to measure racial identity, the Visible Racial/Ethnic Group Identity Attitudes Scale (Helms & Carter, 1990), has not been empirically validated for use with Asian Indians (nor Asian Americans in general) and therefore may not measure the complex process of racial identity accurately in this population. The implications of this study are important to note. The study’s findings emphasize that acculturation, ethnic identity, and racial identity are separate constructs and should not be used interchangeably in research on ethnic and racial minority groups. Furthermore, the salience of those identity factors varies for Asian Indians such that not all three may be

significant influences in their experiences. The context of immigration and geographic region may also influence which identity factors become more salient.

An exploratory qualitative study investigating identity salience and multiple identities with an Asian American sample has provided preliminary results addressing the validity of the Multidimensional Identity Model (Reynolds & Pope, 1991) with this population (Chen & Guzmán, 2003). The study included 277 individuals who self-identified as Asian American and filled out questionnaires on the internet. This pilot study was part of a larger investigation on racial identity and ethnic identity in Asian Americans. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 68 (mean = 27.5) and consisted of 68.3% women and 31.7% men. The sample included participants from 13 ethnic backgrounds, including biethnic and biracial individuals. The pilot study focused on coding the answer to one open-ended question: “What is the most salient aspect of your identity (e.g. race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexual orientation, religious affiliation)? Please explain briefly.”

The content analysis was conducted according to the existing theoretical framework of the MIM. The coding of the open-ended responses revealed that 52% of the participants identified with one aspect of identity; of those participants, the most frequently listed identity aspects were ethnicity (29%), race (25%), gender (17%), and religion (12%). Another 39% listed multiple aspects of identity as most salient; the most frequent combinations were “ethnicity and gender” (14%), “race and gender” (14%), “all” (10%), “ethnicity and religion” (6%), “race and religion” (5%), and “race, class, and gender” (5%). While only a limited number of identity factors were primed, 9% of

participants rejected those categories in favor of what was termed “universal” aspects of one’s identity, which included “personality”, “human being”, and “career.”

The outcomes suggest that although ethnicity and race are the most salient aspects of identity for many Asian Americans, other aspects of identity – such as gender, religious affiliation, and class – are also salient for many others. Because the open-ended question was originally part of a larger study on racial and ethnic identity, the participants may have been primed to think more about those aspects of their identity, so the outcomes may be biased. Many respondents described difficulty in choosing just one salient identity and listed multiple aspects of identity as salient in their lives. The results of this preliminary study support the current study, which proposes further research on the salience of multiple aspects of identity.

#### *Internally Defined versus Externally Defined Identity*

One dimension of the Multidimensional Identity Model (Reynolds & Pope, 1991) regarding identification with aspects of identity involves either passive acceptance of societal views or personal conscious choice. Passive acceptance of societal views reflects an externally defined identity while personal conscious choice refers to a more internally defined identity. In Cross’s (1987) discussion on identity development, he expanded the concept of reference group orientation (i.e., social identity) by differentiating between personal reference group orientation and ascriptive reference group orientation. Personal reference group orientation reflects the choice of the individual to create an internally defined social identity, while ascriptive reference group orientation refers to how social identity is often imposed upon the individual by someone else (i.e., externally defined).

Cross made the distinction in light of the tendency of researchers to ascribe reference group orientation in an experimental setting, whereas clinicians ideally would allow for a self-defined (personal) reference group orientation in a clinical setting. Therefore, although race and gender are often salient as ascriptive reference group orientations, this is not necessarily the case for personal reference group orientations, which could be religion, socioeconomic status, or sexual identity, for example. In this manner, by assuming incorrectly what aspects of identity are salient for individuals, researchers may be missing possible factors that influence identity development and salience.

Although Chen and Guzmán's (2003) exploratory qualitative study on identity salience was not specifically investigating internal and external definitions of identity, participant responses indicated that the salience of identity was often influenced by societal context.

I would suppose my race to be the most salient aspect of my identity. Others notice that I'm not 100% Asian and therefore that triggers conversation. When others take note of a particular aspect of you, I think you tend to identify with that more often.

In this example, the respondent indicated that the external factor of how others treat her/him impacted how s/he personally identified with that aspect of identity. However, even if identification with an aspect of identity was influenced by societal views, it did not necessarily negate personal meaning or conscious choice. Another response revealed the complex nature of defining one's identity within a sociocultural context:

My ethnicity is the most salient. I believe since the world is still very superficial, my face will be a first time determinant of how others decide to treat me. I believe I am who I am because of my background (Chinese) especially since my mother instilled a great deal of Chinese values and customs in me ever since I was a child...

Here, the respondent acknowledged that society's reaction to him/her has influenced

his/her ethnicity to be more salient but that there is a lot of personal meaning and value associated with being Chinese. In order to deal with the reality that society still treats people differently based on social group memberships (e.g., race, gender, socioeconomic status), external definitions of identity may be incorporated into internal definitions of identity.

This concept is related to the main characteristic of the womanist identity model of having an internally defined identity as opposed to an externally defined one (Helms, 1990, as cited in Ossana, Helms, & Leonard, 1992). In the womanist identity model, having an internally defined identity is not equated with the rejection of the mainstream worldview of gender. Rather, an internally defined identity reflects “personal and ideological flexibility that may or may not be accompanied by acknowledged feminist beliefs or social activism” (Ossana, Helms, & Leonard, 1992, p. 403). Helms’s racial identity models are also based on the premise that individuals begin with accepting external/societal views on their racial group and progress to a status where they internalize a personally meaningful and affirming racial identity (Helms, 1996). Implicit in Helms’s models is that internal definitions of social identity are unavoidably affected on some level by external definitions (i.e., societal views) of social identity.

In sum, the concept of internally defined versus externally defined identity has been included in theories of identity but has not been empirically investigated. Scholars have advocated that identity development be conceptualized within the sociocultural context (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002; Neville & Mobley, 2001). This points to the need for identity researchers to consider the impact of external definitions of social group

membership on internal definitions of identity. In fact, the qualitative data of Chen and Guzmán's (2003) exploratory study prompted the current study to include an investigation of internal and external definitions of identity as a major component of identification with social groups.

### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of the dissertation study was to examine within-group differences in the Asian American population. Existing theory and research indicate that multiple social identities need to be considered in identity development because the sociocultural context is so complex and diverse (Finley, 1997; Greene, 2000; Hurtado, 1997; Phinney, 1993; Reynolds & Pope, 1991). Because little empirical research has been conducted on the management of multiple identities, one aim of the study was to clarify the concepts in the Multidimensional Identity Model (Reynolds & Pope, 1991) regarding identification with multiple identities and contribute to the literature in this area.

Specifically, the study examined whether Asian Americans tend to identify with a single aspect of identity or with multiple aspects of identity. One component of the Multidimensional Identity Model pertains to the *management* of multiple aspects of identity. Regarding individuals who identify with multiple aspects of identity, an additional area that was examined was how they manage multiple identities, especially concerning conflict created by identifying with multiple identities. Because this is a new area of exploration, it was important to explore how the process of managing multiple identities impacts well-being (e.g., self-esteem and life satisfaction). Another dimension of the Multidimensional Identity Model is the impact of external, societal views on

identification with social identities. Little research has been conducted in this area, but theoretical discussions support investigation in this area of internally defined versus externally defined identity (Chen & Guzmán, 2003; Cross, 1987). Hence, the influence of societal views of identity on internal definitions of social identities was also investigated in this study.



## CHAPTER THREE

### METHOD

This chapter outlines the participants, procedures, and measures used in this dissertation study.

#### *Participants*

Participants were recruited through e-mail lists of Asian American organizations, such as the Asian American Psychological Association and Asian American Studies of the University of Texas at Austin. Additionally, the snowball method was used to recruit participants through personal contacts, who were then asked to refer other qualified individuals to participate in the study. A link to the study's website was provided in the recruitment e-mail; thus, participation in the study was completely voluntary.

Individuals self-identified as Asian American and who are at least 18 years of age were eligible to participate. Because using the internet allowed this study access to a larger population (as compared to what is usually available on a college campus), the participants were diverse in age, ethnicity, religion, generation status, and geographic location. These variables are usually listed as limitations to studies based on college student samples, so this study aimed to address these limitations by obtaining a more diverse sample through on-line recruitment.

Participants were 287 Asian Americans (93.0% mono-racial and 7.0% multi-racial) recruited through e-mail lists to participate in the study, which was conducted on-line. The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 63 ( $M = 28.48$ ,  $SD = 8.49$ , median =

26.00). Females made up 73.9% (n = 212) of the sample, while males made up 26.1% (n = 75). The skew of more female participants may be a result of the study being disseminated to individuals in the fields of psychology and higher education (via listservs), which tend to consist of more women than men. A majority of the participants identified as heterosexual (90.9%), while 5.6% identified as bisexual and 3.5% identified as gay or lesbian.

More than half of the participants (57.8%) indicated they were second-generation Asian Americans (born in the U.S. to immigrant parents), while 18.8% described themselves as “1.5 generation” (foreign-born and immigrated to the U.S. before the age of 10). Another 9.1% of the sample identified themselves as third or more generation Asian American. Of the 14.3% (n = 41) who indicated they were immigrants, 7 (17.0%) have lived in the U.S. for less than 10 years, 16 (39.0%) have lived in the U.S. for 10-19 years, and 18 (43.9%) have lived in the U.S. for 20 years or more.

Sixteen Asian ethnicities were represented in the sample either alone or in combination with other Asian ethnicities or non-Asian ethnicities (also considered multi-racial). Respondents had the option to select as many ethnic groups that comprised their ethnic heritage; 70 participants (24.4%) indicated more than one ethnic group (including non-Asian ethnic groups) for their heritage, while 217 participants (75.6%) indicated only one ethnic group. About half (52.9%) of the multiethnic Asian Americans reported common combinations of Chinese/Taiwanese (22.9%), Vietnamese/Chinese (12.9%), Indian/Pakistani (4.3%), Thai/Chinese (4.3%), Japanese/Chinese (4.3%), and Chinese/Filipino (4.3%). Multiracial Asian Americans comprised 27.1% of participants

who selected multiple ethnic heritage groups. Of the participants who indicated only one ethnic group ( $n = 217$ ), 31.8% were Chinese, 15.7% were Korean, 12.4% were Indian, 11.1% were Filipino, 6.9% were Japanese, 6.9% were Taiwanese, 6.0% were Vietnamese, 3.7% were Hmong, and 5.5% were other Asian ethnic groups (Pakistani, Laotian, Thai, Okinawan, Mongolian, Bangladeshi, Indonesian, and Malaysian).

In terms of religious affiliation, about half of the sample (49.5%) did not identify with an organized religious group, 19.9% identified as Protestant/Christian, 14.3% identified as Catholic, 5.2% identified as Hindu, 4.5% identified as Buddhist, 1.7% identified as Muslim, 1.0% identified as Latter Day Saints/Mormon, and 3.8% identified with other organized religious groups.

#### *Procedure*

Ethical guidelines for human research developed by the American Psychological Association and the Institutional Review Board at the University of Texas at Austin were followed. Approval from the Institutional Review Board at the University of Texas at Austin was obtained prior to proceeding with the study.

After approval by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Texas at Austin was received, a recruitment e-mail (see Appendix A) was sent to e-mail lists of Asian American organizations (e.g., the Asian American Psychological Association, Asian American Studies at the University of Texas at Austin, and local chapters of the Asian American Journalist Association) as well as to personal contacts to recruit participants. The e-mail lists of these organizations reach a large number of people across the U.S. The Asian American Psychological Association's e-mail list includes 460

members and many non-member subscribers. The recruitment e-mail provided a brief overview of the purpose of the study and a link to the study's website. The e-mail stated explicitly that eligible participants are those who are 18 years or older and identify themselves as Asian American. To assure potential participants that ethical standards were being followed in this study, information regarding approval by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Texas at Austin was included in the recruitment e-mail. Participation was voluntary in that individuals proceed to the on-line study only if they chose to go to the study's website. This recruitment procedure for conducting a study on-line was utilized in a pilot study (Chen, LePhuoc, Rude, & Guzmán, 2003), and over 340 responses were gathered over a one-month period. An incentive to participate was provided by giving participants an opportunity to win one of four gift certificates to an on-line bookstore. Those who were interested in winning a gift certificate sent the researcher a separate e-mail after they participated in the study. At the conclusion of data collection, four participants were randomly chosen to receive a gift certificate to an on-line bookstore.

On the study website, an introduction to the study was provided on the first page. The participants were asked to read the terms of the consent form, which informed them that procedures to maintain confidentiality of their responses will be followed and that participation in the study is completely voluntary. If participants agreed to the terms of the consent form, they proceeded to the study (see Appendix B). If they chose not to agree with the consent form or if they acknowledged that they were not at least 18 years of age or did not identify as Asian American, then they exited the study immediately.

After participants agreed to the consent form, a demographics page asked for basic descriptive information, including age, ethnicity, educational background, generational status, income, race, religious affiliation, sex, sexual orientation, current state of residence, size of town/city of residence, and community make-up. The main measures for the study followed the demographics page. These included measures of social group identification, self-esteem, and life satisfaction. The estimated time for completion of the demographics page and the measures was 20-25 minutes.

### *Measures*

Participants were asked to respond to measures that assess multiple social identities, self-esteem, and life satisfaction. In the measure of multiple social identities, participants were instructed to respond from two perspectives – the self-view and the societal view. Self-view refers to how individuals personally identify (i.e., internally define) themselves as members of social groups. The societal view refers to how individuals perceive society to assign social group memberships to them (i.e., external definition of identity). The measures of self-esteem and life satisfaction are self-report measures that ask participants' about their view of themselves.

### *Demographic Information*

Participants were asked to fill out information regarding their biological sex, age, race, ethnicity, income, educational background, generational status, sexual orientation, religion, current state of residence, size of town/city of residence, and community make-up (see Appendix C).

### *Measure of Social Group Identities and How They are Managed*

As there is no published instrument specifically measuring multiple social identities and how they are managed, this dissertation study adapted the format from Dunbar (1997) and supplemented it with additional questions.

#### *Social Group Identification.*

The format of the Social Group Identification scale is adapted from a subscale of the Personal Dimensions of Difference scale (Dunbar, 1997), which examines “multi-group identity” (see Appendix D). The dimensions that were measured include the following social group categories: age, ethnicity, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status. Respondents were instructed to rate each social group category on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all identified) to 5 (very strongly identified).

Because the meanings of some terms vary in colloquial usage, definitions were provided for each term: age, race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status. For instance, race was distinguished from ethnicity through the following statements:

**Ethnicity** refers to national or cultural heritage (e.g., being Vietnamese, Filipino, Indian, etc.).

**Race** is meant to refer to social groups (e.g., Asian American) that are partly based on physical characteristics, like facial features.

Gender and sexual orientation were also defined so that participants understand the intended meaning of the terms:

**Gender** refers to the social and cultural meanings associated with being born female or male.

**Sexual orientation** refers to being attracted to individuals of the opposite sex, same sex, or both sexes.

The Social Group Identification scale has two different instructional conditions – one asking for a self-view of social identity, and the other asking for perceived societal view of social identity. Regarding the self-view of social group identification, participants were given the following instructions: “Using the rating scale below, please indicate how strongly *you* identify yourself as a member of each of the following social groups. Please be sure to respond to each item.” An example was provided to clarify the instructions:

For example, Angie is a Mexican-American woman who is of the Catholic faith. For Angie, her view of herself is influenced to varying degrees by her ethnic, gender, and religious identities.

An example of a Mexican-American was used instead of an Asian American to avoid presenting any generalizations about specific Asian ethnic groups (e.g., a Catholic Filipino) which may have a negative impact on those who do not fit the example (e.g., an atheist Filipino).

For the perceived societal view of social group identification, participants were given the following instructions: “Society often associates people with social group categories. Using the rating scale below, please indicate how strongly you perceive *society in general* assigns the group memberships below to you (whether you personally identify with them or not). Please be sure to respond to each item.” Again, here an example was provided to clarify the instructions:

In our example of Angie, she may feel that people see her mostly as a young Mexican-American woman and not as someone with a strong Catholic faith.

Supplementing the Social Group Identification scale was a set of response questions regarding why respondents identified with social groups. For example, once participants indicated their self-view of multiple social identities, they were asked to respond to the following questions: “Looking back on your ratings above [regarding the social group identification scale], please indicate those three social groups with which you most strongly identify yourself (if more than 3, please choose only 3 for this question). Please explain why you chose these three as your most significant social group identities.” Here, because the instructions were open-ended, the respondents were given the opportunity to elaborate on their ratings on the Social Group Identification scale.

#### *Managing Multiple Social Identities.*

A set of questions regarding the management of multiple social identities made up the rest of the supplemental questions to the Social Group Identification scale (see Appendix D). One question asked if respondents experience conflict based on the social groups they identify with: “When you think about your life now, does identifying with more than one social group simultaneously cause conflict within you?” If respondents indicated “yes” to this question, they were instructed to reply to the following question: “Which sets of social group identities generally create conflict within you?” An open-ended format was given here, so respondents could indicate two or more social group identities. Then the respondents were instructed to rate an item about this conflict on a Likert scale of 1 to 5, with 1 = *not at all* and 5 = *to a great extent*: “Using the scale below, please indicate the degree to which they cause conflict on a regular basis.”



Another open-ended question asked the respondent to provide a more elaborated explanation about conflict in identifying with multiple social identities: “If you indicated some degree of conflict, please provide an example so we can understand better the kinds of conflicts you experience.”

Other supplemental questions explored how societal views influence participants’ self-identification with social groups. For instance, one question asked respondents to rate on a Likert scale of 1 to 5 (with 1 = *not at all* and 5 = *to a great extent*) their perception of how much societal views differ from the respondent’s self-view of social group identities: “Thinking about your self-view and societal views, in your opinion, to what degree do the societal views differ from your self-view?” If respondents indicated a moderate degree (a rating of 3 or higher) of difference between self-view and societal views, they were asked to respond to the following question: “Does this difference between societal views and your self-view cause conflict in you?” If respondents indicated “yes” to this question, they proceeded to the next couple of open-ended questions: “Which views typically cause you conflict? How do you manage this conflict?” The final open-ended question inquired about the influence of societal views on how respondents identify with social groups:

Up to this point, you have indicated your personal identification with various social groups. You have also indicated how you perceive *society* to identify you with social groups. We are interested in understanding how societal views affect how you identify with social groups. Please explain how, in your experience, societal factors influence the way you identify with your social groups.

### *Measure of Self-Esteem*

The Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) is a 10-item self-report measure of self-

esteem (see Appendix E). Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert scale (from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree”). Examples of items are “On the whole, I am satisfied with myself,” and “All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.” Five items are reversed scored; the total score is an average of the item ratings and can range from 1 to 5, with higher scores reflecting greater self-esteem. The scale has an internal consistency reliability ranging from .88 for a college sample over a two week period (Rosenberg, 1965). Using a 5-point scale for the Self-Esteem Scale, Alarcon (1997) reported a Cronbach’s alpha of .87 for a sample of 74 Asian American women, ages 19-64. Similarly, the alpha coefficient reported for a Korean American adolescent sample ( $n = 129$ ) was .88 (Nho, 2000). In the current study ( $N = 264$ ), a reliability analysis revealed a Cronbach’s alpha of .87 ( $M = 4.10$ ,  $SD = .64$ ).

#### *Measure of Life Satisfaction*

The Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985) measures subjective well-being and consists of five items to be rated on a 7-point Likert scale that ranges from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree (see Appendix F). The current study utilized a 5-point scale to stay consistent with the scales of the other measures of the current study. Thus, the total score is based on a sum of item ratings and can range from 5 to 25, with higher scores indicating higher life satisfaction. The scale was developed based on a sample of 176 undergraduates and 53 elderly citizens (mean age = 75). In the original study, the internal consistency was measured to be .87, and the test-retest reliability was .82 for a two-month period. Since its development, the Satisfaction With Life Scale has been widely used and numerous studies have established its usefulness with populations

diverse in age, culture, and clinical issues (Pavot & Diener, 1993). The scale has also demonstrated high reliability (internal consistency ranging from .79 to .89) and strong construct validity (Pavot & Diener, 1993). The reliability analysis in the current study ( $N = 267$ ) resulted in a Cronbach's alpha of .85 for this scale ( $M = 17.42$ ,  $SD = 4.07$ ).

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

In this chapter, the research questions and analyses used in the study are described. The results of the study are also presented.

#### *Research Questions and Analyses*

This study's investigation of the intersection of identities in Asian American individuals included assessing the salience of various aspects of social identity. The following are the social identities that were studied: age, ethnicity, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status. Additionally, this study explored the relationships among the various aspects of identity and how they relate to self-esteem and life satisfaction. Finally, the influence of social environment on personal identification with these social identities was examined.

#### *The Salience of Social Identities*

A common assumption in research on Asian American women and men is that ethnicity or race is the most significant, or salient, aspect of identity. However, this overlooks the possibility of individual differences in how Asian American individuals conceptualize their identity. For instance, various social identities relating to socioeconomic class, sex, religion, age, and sexual orientation may also be important. The notion of varying salience of social identities has not been explored extensively with the Asian American population. Some of the lack of research on identity salience may be due to the tendency not to consider multiple social identities simultaneously in the field

of psychology (Greene, 2000; Lowe & Mascher, 2001). However, this is counterintuitive since one of the core themes of ethnic, racial, and sexual identity development models is the consideration of individuals' subjective experience of social statuses and how they are incorporated into their identity. It seems imperative then to examine subjective experiences of various social identities in relation to each other in terms of salience as well.

Research question: What are the most salient aspects of social identity for Asian American participants?

The results of the Social Group Identification scale revealed that the most salient aspects of social identity for the participants ( $N = 287$ ) in terms of self-identification were ethnicity ( $M = 3.95$ ,  $SD = 1.01$ ), gender ( $M = 3.92$ ,  $SD = 1.01$ ), and race ( $M = 3.87$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ). The least salient aspect of social identity was religion ( $M = 2.71$ ,  $SD = 1.42$ ). (See Table 1 for means and standard deviations for the self-view of social identities.) For the most part, these results are supported by the open-ended responses to the question asking participants “to indicate those three social groups with which you most strongly identify yourself” – the 837 responses (approximately 3 for each participant) consisted of 22.0% ethnicity, 21.4% gender, 19.9% race, 13.3% age, 9.4% socioeconomic status (SES), 7.8% religion, 5.3% sexual orientation, and 0.8% other (e.g., career, education, nationality, etc.).

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed to determine if differences existed in the salience of social aspects of identity for female and male participants. The multivariate main effect for participant sex on salient aspects of self-

Table 1

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*Means and Standard Deviations of Self-View of Social Identities (N = 287)*

(5-point Likert scale: 1 = not at all identified, 5 = very strongly identified)

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<u>Social Identity</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
ethnicity	3.94	1.01
gender	3.92	1.01
race	3.87	1.06
age	3.37	1.00
socioeconomic status	3.17	1.01
sexual orientation	3.10	1.24
religion	2.70	1.43

---

identity was significant, Wilks' lambda = .84,  $F(7, 279) = 7.54$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .16$ . Univariate analyses revealed significant differences in women's and men's identity salience of ethnicity,  $F(1, 285) = 4.95$ ,  $p = .027$ ,  $\eta^2 = .02$ , gender,  $F(1, 285) = 31.68$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .10$ , and sexual orientation,  $F(1, 285) = 8.92$ ,  $p = .003$ ,  $\eta^2 = .03$ , but not for race, age, socioeconomic status, or religion. The effect sizes ( $\eta^2$ ) for the sex differences are small, and thus the magnitude of this difference is not great. (See Table 2 for means and standard deviations by participant sex.) Women endorsed ethnicity ( $M = 4.02$ ,  $SD = .98$ ) and gender ( $M = 4.11$ ,  $SD = .92$ ) as salient aspects of social identity significantly higher than men (ethnicity,  $M = 3.72$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ , and gender,  $M = 3.39$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ). However, men endorsed sexual orientation ( $M = 3.47$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ) as a salient aspect of social identity significantly higher than women ( $M = 2.98$ ,  $SD = 1.26$ ).

A series of analyses of variance (ANOVAs) was also performed to examine whether women and men in the sample differed with regard to age, self-esteem, and life satisfaction. No significant differences were found in age,  $F(1, 283) = .006$ ,  $p = .94$ , self-esteem,  $F(1, 262) = .349$ ,  $p = .56$ , or life satisfaction,  $F(1, 265) = 2.55$ ,  $p = .11$  (see Table 3 for means and standard deviations by participant sex).

### *The Intersection of Multiple Social Identities*

Although research on the intersection of identities with Asian Americans is scarce, many scholars have advocated for more extensive study on multiple social identities (Fukuyama & Ferguson, 2000; Greene, 2000; Hurtado, 1997; Phinney, 1993; Reynolds & Pope, 1991; Vernon, 1999). Preliminary studies exploring the intersection of ethnic and gender identities in Asian Americans support the notion that they often

Table 2

*Means and Standard Deviations in Salience of Social Identity by Participant Sex*

<u>Social Identity</u>	<u>Females</u> ( <i>n</i> = 212)		<u>Males</u> ( <i>n</i> = 75)	
	<u><i>M</i></u>	<u><i>SD</i></u>	<u><i>M</i></u>	<u><i>SD</i></u>
ethnicity	4.02*	.98	3.72*	1.06
gender	4.11**	.92	3.39**	1.06
race	3.92	1.05	3.75	1.09
age	3.39	1.00	3.31	.99
SES	3.19	1.02	3.13	.98
sexual orientation	2.98**	1.26	3.47**	1.09
religion	2.67	1.43	2.79	1.43

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

Table 3

*Means and Standard Deviations in Age, Self-esteem, and Life Satisfaction by Participant Sex*

	<u>Females</u>			<u>Males</u>		
	<u><i>n</i></u>	<u><i>M</i></u>	<u><i>SD</i></u>	<u><i>n</i></u>	<u><i>M</i></u>	<u><i>SD</i></u>
age	212	28.46	8.38	73	28.55	8.84
RSES <sup>a</sup>	194	4.12	.65	70	4.06	.63
SWLS <sup>b</sup>	197	17.66	4.18	70	16.76	3.70

<sup>a</sup> Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale; scores can range from 1 to 5

<sup>b</sup> Satisfaction with Life Scale; scores can range from 5 to 25



identify with more than one social group (Alarcon, 1997; Roberts, 2001). Additionally, the intersection of racial and gay/lesbian identities appears to be a complex issue for gays and lesbians of color (Chan, C. S., 1989; Crawford et al., 2002). Furthermore, Asian Americans may also perceive society to associate multiple social identities with them, perhaps some social identities more so than others.

Managing multiple social identities may also cause conflict within individuals who feel they cannot express certain aspects of their identity comfortably in their community (Fouad & Brown, 2000; Greene, 2000; Phinney, 1993). What is unknown for Asian Americans is how they manage multiple identities across several factors (i.e., age, ethnicity, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status) and how this affects their self-esteem and life satisfaction. Based on preliminary research on the intersection of identities, it was expected that Asian Americans would identify with multiple social groups. It also seemed reasonable to infer that, for some individuals, identifying with multiple social groups would cause conflict within them.

Research question: What are the common combinations for those who identify with multiple aspects of social identity?

Cluster analyses are often used to develop a classification of data and to create hypotheses through data exploration, specifically through the categorization of cases into fairly homogeneous groups (Aldenderfer & Blashfield, 1984). In general, cluster analysis methods are considered heuristics and are “not supported by an extensive body of statistical reasoning” (Aldenderfer & Blashfield, 1984, p. 14). However, cluster analyses can be helpful in examining data in other ways. A cluster analysis can help identify

patterns of participant responses among multiple variables, which in this study are the various social identities. A classification into clusters can also aid in the analysis of a sample with other variables. In the current study, classifying participants into clusters allowed for a cluster comparison on participant characteristics (i.e., demographic variables, self-esteem, and life satisfaction).

A *k*-means cluster analysis (Hartigan, 1975) was used in this study to create relatively homogeneous groups of cases (i.e., minimizing variance within the cluster) based on the degree of identification with the seven aspects of social identity. Compared to other cluster methods, such as hierarchical agglomerative methods, the *k*-means cluster method does not create overlapping clusters, so cases are in distinct clusters. Another benefit of the *k*-means method is that the sample is not necessarily partitioned into equal-sized clusters, as is the tendency in the hierarchical cluster method, Ward's method (Aldenderfer & Blashfield, 1984). This flexibility in cluster size allows for the possibility that some clusters will include more cases than others. The *k*-means cluster method is an iterative partitioning method that involves multiple passes through the data in order to sort cases into non-overlapping clusters (Aldenderfer & Blashfield, 1984). The *k*-means cluster analysis assigns each participant into one of several clusters, which are characterized by different profile patterns (i.e., combination of multiple aspects of identity).

A cluster analysis was performed to determine what combinations of social identity aspects emerged for the self-view of social identity. For the self-identification rating scale, it was determined a four cluster-solution best fits the data based on an

examination of cluster means and interpretability (see Table 4 for cluster means and standard deviations).

Cluster 1 individuals endorsed medium ratings on age and race, and low ratings on ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status. Generally, it appears that cluster 1 does not identify very strongly with any aspect of social identity. However, very few participants fit this profile; only 5.6% ( $n = 16$ ) of the sample fell into this cluster. Cluster 2 is characterized by high ratings on ethnicity, gender, and race, medium ratings on age and socioeconomic status, medium-low ratings on sexual orientation, and low ratings on religion. Thus, ethnicity, gender, and race seem to be the most salient aspects of social identity for individuals in cluster 2. About a quarter of the sample (26.8%,  $n = 77$ ) made up cluster 2. Individuals in cluster 3 are characterized by high ratings on ethnicity, gender, race, and religion, medium-high ratings on sexual orientation, and medium ratings on age and socioeconomic status. Cluster 3 appears to regard all aspects of social identity as fairly important or very important. Cluster 3 was the largest cluster with 117 individuals (40.8% of the sample), which suggests that multiple social identities are salient in one's self-identification for an Asian American sample. Cluster 4 endorsed medium-high ratings on age and gender, medium ratings on ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status, and medium low ratings on religion. Individuals in cluster 4 seem to find most aspects of social identity to be moderately important with the exception of religion. Cluster 4 consisted of the remaining 77 individuals (26.8% of the sample). (See Figure 1 for cluster profiles.)

Table 4

*Cluster Means (SD) for Self-View of Social Identities*

<u>Social Identity</u>	<u>Cluster 1</u> <i>n</i> = 16	<u>Cluster 2</u> <i>n</i> = 77	<u>Cluster 3</u> <i>n</i> = 117	<u>Cluster 4</u> <i>n</i> = 77
age	2.69 (1.01)	3.23 (.97)	3.42 (1.02)	3.56 (.92)
ethnicity	2.25 (1.00)	4.34 (.74)	4.33 (.78)	3.30 (.86)
gender	2.13 (1.02)	4.06 (.95)	4.07 (.92)	3.94 (.85)
race	2.50 (1.03)	4.49 (.62)	4.23 (.85)	3.00 (.87)
religion	1.44 (.63)	1.55 (.68)	4.08 (.81)	2.04 (1.03)
sexual orientation	2.44 (1.46)	2.06 (.92)	3.70 (1.01)	3.38 (1.06)
socioeconomic status	1.81 (.66)	2.87 (.96)	3.38 (.97)	3.44 (.85)

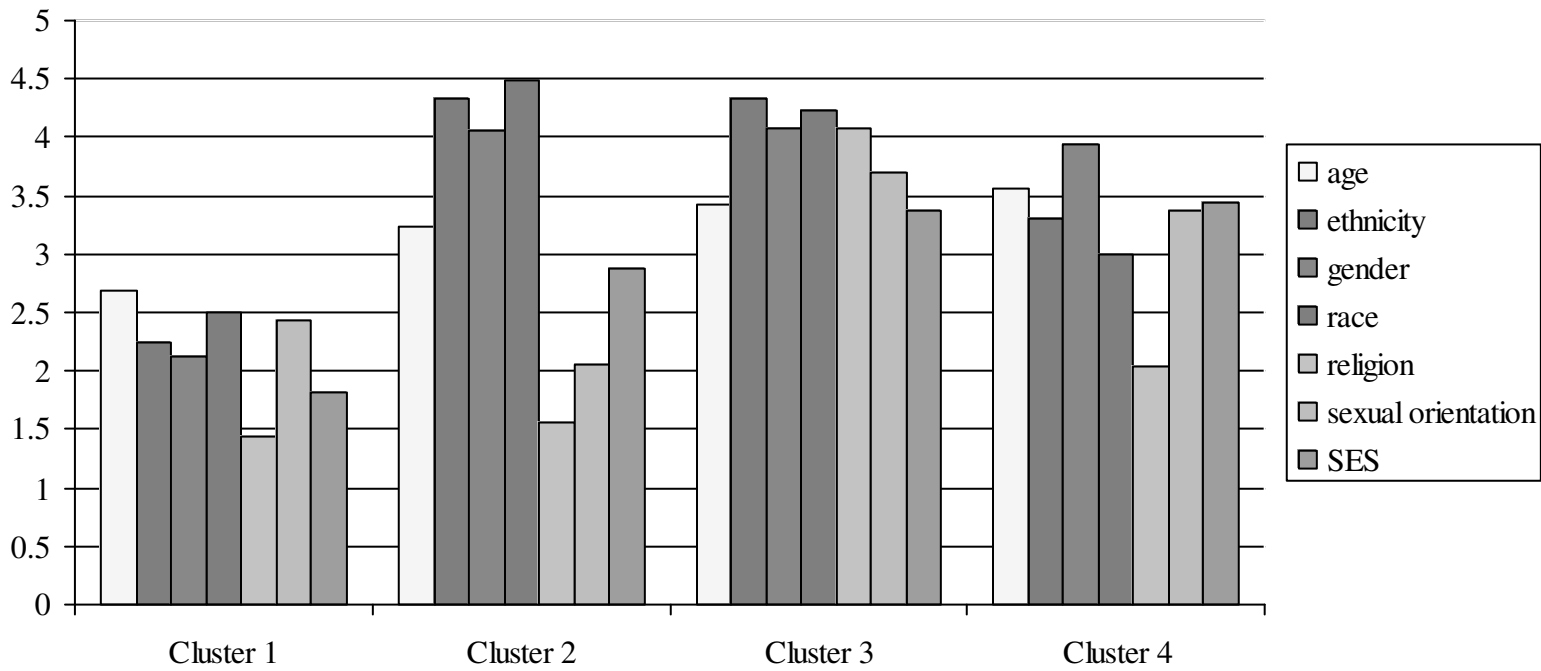


Figure 1. *Clusters for Self-View of Social Identities*

Research questions: How do these clusters differ on the demographics of age, sex, generational status, and sexual orientation? How do these clusters differ on self-esteem and life satisfaction?

Cross-tabulation statistics and chi-square tests of association were conducted to determine cluster group differences based on the categorical variables of sex, generational status, and sexual orientation. The clusters did not differ significantly in sex,  $\chi^2$  (df 3,  $N = 287$ ) = 7.51,  $p = .057$ , Cramer's  $V = .16$ , generational status,  $\chi^2$  (df 12,  $N = 287$ ) = 7.22,  $p = .843$ , Cramer's  $V = .07$ , or sexual orientation,  $\chi^2$  (df 6,  $N = 287$ ) = 8.56,  $p = .200$ , Cramer's  $V = .12$ . One-way ANOVAs were performed to determine cluster group differences in age, self-esteem, and life satisfaction (see Table 5 for means and standard deviations). The results revealed no significant difference among clusters in age,  $F(3, 281) = .223$ ,  $p = .880$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .002$ , self-esteem,  $F(3, 261) = .034$ ,  $p = .992$ , partial  $\eta^2 < .001$ , and satisfaction with life,  $F(3, 263) = .723$ ,  $p = .539$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .008$ .

Research question: Do participants in some clusters report more conflict within themselves about their identities than those in other clusters?

For the overall sample, 37.1% of participants reported having conflict within themselves about their identities, while 62.9% did not have any conflict about their identities. The participants with conflict had significantly lower self-esteem than those without conflict,  $t(261) = -2.10$ ,  $p = .036$ , Cohen's  $d = -0.27$ . The effect size (Cohen's  $d$ ) reflects a small amount of practical importance though. There was no significant difference between the participants with conflict and those without conflict regarding life satisfaction  $t(264) = -1.63$ , Cohen's  $d = -0.20$ . A chi-square analysis was conducted to

Table 5

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*Means and Standard Deviations in Age, Self-Esteem, and Life Satisfaction by Self-View Cluster*

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	<u>Cluster 1</u>			<u>Cluster 2</u>			<u>Cluster 3</u>			<u>Cluster 4</u>		
	<u><i>n</i></u>	<u><i>M</i></u>	<u><i>SD</i></u>	<u><i>n</i></u>	<u><i>M</i></u>	<u><i>SD</i></u>	<u><i>n</i></u>	<u><i>M</i></u>	<u><i>SD</i></u>	<u><i>n</i></u>	<u><i>M</i></u>	<u><i>SD</i></u>
age	15	28.87	10.49	77	28.96	8.56	117	28.52	8.81	76	27.87	7.58
RSES	13	4.14	.67	72	4.12	.65	108	4.09	.58	71	4.10	.74
SWLS	13	17.46	3.48	74	18.00	4.32	109	17.12	4.11	71	17.28	3.88

---

see if differences between cluster groups existed regarding the proportion of respondents reporting conflict within themselves about their social identities. A 2 x 4 chi-square test indicated that the relationship between conflict with identities and cluster membership was significant at the  $p < .05$  level,  $\chi^2$  (df 3,  $N = 283$ ) = 9.44,  $p = .024$ , Cramer's  $V = .18$ . The effect size (Cramer's  $V$ ) suggests there is some practical importance regarding cluster differences on the experience of conflict. Very few (6.2%) individuals in cluster 1 reported conflict within themselves regarding their identities in comparison to 44.3% of cluster 3 individuals reporting conflict within themselves (see Table 6). Approximately one third of both cluster 2 (35.1%) and cluster 4 (34.7%) individuals indicated having conflict within themselves regarding their social identities.

#### *The Influence of Societal Views on Internal Definitions of Identity*

Because individuals live within a larger society, identity development is unavoidably influenced by their sociocultural context. Societal views on social group memberships often affect how individuals personally identify with those social groups (Brewer, 2001; Cross, 1987; Deaux, 1993). According to Helms (1990, as cited in Ossana, Helms, & Leonard, 1992), the process of identity development is influenced by external factors, such as societal views, to some degree. The goal in Helms's identity development models is for individuals to choose to reject or integrate societal views into their identity and ultimately to have an internally defined identity. Therefore, investigating the influence of societal views on the self-view of identity would contribute to the understanding of identity development, especially regarding the intersection of identities.



Table 6

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*Conflict regarding Social Identities by Self-View Cluster*

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<u>Identity conflict</u>	<u>Cluster 1</u> <i>n</i> = 16	<u>Cluster 2</u> <i>n</i> = 77	<u>Cluster 3</u> <i>n</i> = 115	<u>Cluster 4</u> <i>n</i> = 75
yes	6.2%	35.1%	44.3%	34.7%
no	93.8%	64.9%	55.7%	65.3%

---

Research question: How do Asian American individuals perceive how society assigns social identities to them?

The results of the Social Group Identification scale revealed that the participants perceived society as assigning most strongly to them the social identities of race ( $M = 4.40$ ,  $SD = .91$ ), gender ( $M = 4.15$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ), and ethnicity ( $M = 4.10$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ). The aspect of social identity that was perceived to be assigned the least strongly by society was religion ( $M = 2.55$ ,  $SD = 1.21$ ). The mean ratings of the perceived societal view on social identities parallel the self-view although race was rated highest in the perceived societal view while ethnicity was rated highest in the self-view. (See Table 7 for means and standard deviations for perceived societal view of social identities.)

Research question: Do Asian Americans perceive that society assigns visible social identities, such as race and gender, more strongly to them than they personally identify with?

A repeated measures multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed to determine if differences existed between self-defined social identity and perceived societal view of social identity existed for the seven identity aspects: age, ethnicity gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status. The multivariate main effect for salient aspects of self-identity and perceived societal view of social identity was significant, Wilks' lambda = .73,  $F(7, 272) = 14.69$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .27$ . Paired samples t-tests were then performed to determine specific significant differences between self-defined social identity and perceived societal view of social identity existed for age, ethnicity gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, and

Table 7

*Means and Standard Deviations of Perceived Societal View of Social Identities (N = 287)*  
 (5-point Likert scale: 1 = not at all identified, 5 = very strongly identified)

<u>Social Identity</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
race	4.40	.91
gender	4.15	1.03
ethnicity	4.10	1.08
age	3.62	1.07
socioeconomic status	3.43	1.03
sexual orientation	3.04	1.30
religion	2.55	1.21

socioeconomic status. The pairs were based on the two instructional conditions of the Social Group Identification Scale: 1) degree of identification with group membership from a self-defined view and 2) degree of identification with group membership from perceived societal view.

The two-tailed paired samples t-tests revealed significant differences between participants' self-identification and their perception of societal views regarding their social identities. (See Table 8 for means and standard deviations.) For five of the social identities, the perceptions of societal views were rated higher than participants' own self-identification: age,  $t(288) = -3.62, p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = -.25$ , ethnicity,  $t(289) = -2.09, p = .037$ , Cohen's  $d = -.15$ , gender,  $t(287) = -3.62, p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = -.23$ , race,  $t(289) = -8.73, p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = -.54$ , and socioeconomic status,  $t(286) = -3.53, p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = -.26$ . In other words, participants perceived society as assigning these social group memberships to their identity more strongly than they themselves did. The effect sizes (Cohen's  $d$ ) ranged from small (.15) to medium (.54), which indicate small to moderate magnitudes of difference. However, for religion, participants rated their self-identification ( $M = 2.72$ ) significantly higher than their perception ( $M = 2.55$ ) of how strongly society in general assigns religion to them,  $t(287) = 1.97, p = .05$ , Cohen's  $d = .13$ . The effect size of this difference was small though. There was no significant difference in how strongly participants self-identified with sexual orientation ( $M = 3.08$ ) and how strongly they perceived society to assign sexual orientation to their identity ( $M = 3.04$ ),  $t(286) = .51, p = .61$ , Cohen's  $d = .03$ .

Research questions: What cluster profiles emerge from the perceived societal

Table 8

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*Paired-Samples t-tests: Self-View and Perceived Societal View of Social Identities*

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<u>Social Identity</u>		<u>Self-View</u>		<u>Societal View</u>		<u>Cohen's <i>d</i></u>
	<u><i>n</i></u>	<u><i>M</i></u>	<u><i>SD</i></u>	<u><i>M</i></u>	<u><i>SD</i></u>	
age	289	3.36**	.99	3.62**	1.07	-0.252
ethnicity	290	3.94*	1.01	4.10*	1.08	-0.153
gender	288	3.92**	1.01	4.15**	1.03	-0.225
race	290	3.87**	1.06	4.40**	.91	-0.536
SES	287	3.17**	1.00	3.43**	1.03	-0.256
sexual orientation	287	3.08	1.24	3.04	1.30	0.031
religion	288	2.72*	1.42	2.55*	1.21	0.128

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .001$

view of social identities? Are they different from the cluster profiles of the self-view of social identity?

A second cluster analysis was performed to determine what combinations of highly rated identity aspects emerge for the perceived societal view of social identity. A *k*-means cluster analysis (Hartigan, 1975) was conducted to create relatively homogeneous groups of cases based on the degree of perceived societal identification with the seven aspects of social identity. Each cluster is characterized by a profile pattern (i.e., combination of multiple aspects of identity). For the perceived societal view of social identity rating scale, it was determined a four cluster-solution best fits the data based on examination of cluster means and interpretability (see Table 9 for cluster means and standard deviations).

The first cluster (cluster 1) indicated medium ratings regarding perceptions of society in general emphasizing group membership in age, ethnicity, gender, race, and socioeconomic status, medium-low ratings regarding sexual orientation, and low ratings regarding religion. Cluster 1 individuals seem to perceive society in general as attributing group membership to them to a moderate degree regarding many aspects of social identity (age, ethnicity, gender, race, and socioeconomic status) but not emphasizing sexual orientation or religion too much. Cluster 1 made up a small portion of the sample ( $n = 42$ ; 15.1%). Cluster 2 endorsed high ratings on race, medium-high ratings on ethnicity, gender, and religion, and medium ratings on age, sexual orientation and socioeconomic status. Individuals in cluster 2 appear to perceive society in general as assigning group membership most strongly to race, then to ethnicity, gender, and

Table 9

*Cluster Means (SD) for Societal View of Social Identities*

<u>Social Identity</u>	<u>Cluster 1</u> <i>n</i> = 42	<u>Cluster 2</u> <i>n</i> = 64	<u>Cluster 3</u> <i>n</i> = 80	<u>Cluster 4</u> <i>n</i> = 93
age	2.76 (1.16)	3.50 (1.04)	4.18 (.81)	3.59 (1.00)
ethnicity	2.62 (.99)	3.92 (1.03)	4.44 (.91)	4.65 (.50)
gender	3.31 (1.28)	3.78 (1.05)	4.76 (.46)	4.27 (.92)
race	3.24 (1.28)	4.23 (.87)	4.76 (.53)	4.73 (.45)
religion	1.38 (.62)	3.67 (.80)	3.08 (1.08)	1.81 (.74)
sexual orientation	2.33 (1.22)	3.06 (.89)	4.45 (.63)	2.18 (.90)
socioeconomic status	2.93 (1.00)	3.36 (.88)	4.11 (.78)	3.08 (1.02)

religion, and moderately so to age, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status. Cluster 2 individuals made up 22.9% ( $n = 64$ ) of the sample. Cluster 3 is characterized by high ratings on age, ethnicity, gender, race, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status, and medium ratings on religion. Cluster 3 seems to perceive society in general as assigning most aspects of social identity very strongly to them with the exception of religion, which was viewed as being associated with them to a moderate degree. Individuals in cluster 3 made up 28.7% ( $n = 80$ ) of the sample. Cluster 4 endorsed high ratings on ethnicity, gender, and race, medium-high ratings on age, medium ratings on socioeconomic status, medium-low ratings on sexual orientation, and low ratings on religion. Cluster 4 individuals perceive society in general as assigning group membership most strongly to race, ethnicity, and gender, then to age and socioeconomic status, and less so to sexual orientation and religion. One-third of the sample ( $n = 93$ ) made up cluster 4, the largest cluster. (See Figure 2 for cluster profiles.)

The cluster profiles of the perceived societal view were compared to the self-view cluster profiles to see if different combinations of identity aspects emerged for the perceived societal view responses. A central premise of this study was that Asian American identity may be complicated by the difference between 1) how participants perceive they are identified with social groups by society, and 2) the actual salience of those social identities in their self-view of identity. As such, it was expected that qualitative differences would exist between the categories that emerge in the two different cluster analyses.

For the most part, the profiles of the self-identification clusters were not reflected



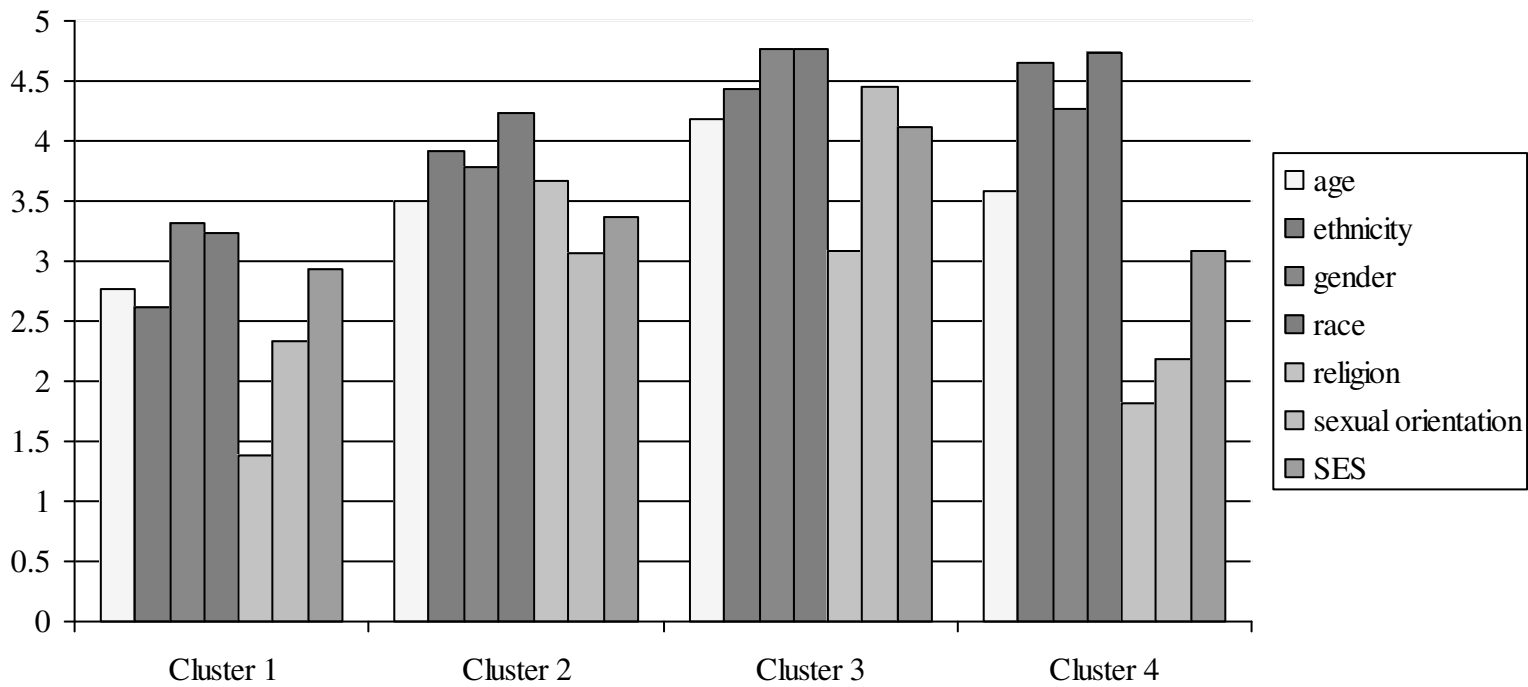


Figure 2. *Clusters for Societal View of Social Identities*

in the perceived societal view clusters. One exception is the similarity of the cluster 2 profile of the self-identification perspective to the cluster 4 profile of the perceived societal view. In both profiles, the highest ratings were given to race, ethnicity, and gender, while there were medium-high ratings on age, medium ratings on socioeconomic status, medium-low ratings on sexual orientation, and low ratings on religion. The perception was that society assigned those social identities to the participants slightly more strongly than the participants did for their self-identification. Overall though, it appears that the participants generally perceived society assigning social identities to them in a different manner from how they viewed themselves.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the results of the study are discussed in depth. A summary of key quantitative findings is provided in relation to existing literature on social identities. Then the study results are discussed in detail regarding the concepts of salience of social identities, the intersection of multiple social identities, the managing of conflicts associated with the intersection of social identities, the influence of societal views on internal definitions of identity, and the role of context. Additionally, counseling implications are presented based on these concepts. Finally, limitations of the current study and directions for future research are discussed.

The responses to open-ended questions collected in the study are incorporated in the discussion where appropriate. The open-ended responses were summarized by the researcher and were not subject to any formal analysis. The inclusion of these open-ended responses is mainly to enhance the interpretation of the quantitative results and to point to areas of future research.

#### *Summary of Key Findings*

In this section, a summary of the key findings of the current study is provided. The study results provided a greater understanding of four main issues related to multiple social identities, namely, salience of social identities, intersection of social identities, conflict associated with social identities, and influence of societal views on internal definitions of identity. These results are discussed in relation to single identity

development models as well as the Multidimensional Identity Model (Reynolds & Pope, 1991), a theoretical model of multiple social identities.

One key finding regarded the salience of social identities for the Asian American sample. The results of the study revealed that the most salient aspects of social identity for the Asian American participants were ethnicity, gender, and race. These results support the findings of the qualitative study conducted by Chen and Guzmán (2003), which showed the most frequent responses about identity salience to be ethnicity, race, and gender. The current study also found the least salient aspects of social identity for the Asian American participants were religion and sexual orientation. There are no other studies that provide quantitative data regarding social identity salience for Asian Americans or for individuals of other racial groups, so the current study is an initial step in examining the concept of social identity salience.

Additionally, results showed that the salience of the different social identities varied for Asian Americans, which has important implications for how single identity development is measured. The findings are also important to consider in relation to single identity development models (e.g., ethnic identity, racial identity, and sexual identity) as well as conceptual models of multiple social identities. Research involving single identity development models often focuses on linking the identity stages or statuses with psychological well-being or self-esteem (Crawford et al., 2002; Neville & Lilly, 2000; Phinney, Lochner, & Murphy, 1990). However, current measures of single identity development (e.g., Cass, 1984; Helms & Carter, 1990; Phinney, 1992) do not consider the salience of the social identity being measured in relation to other social

identities. Thus, the interpretation of results for those studies may be inaccurate since the measures assume that the social identity being measured has the same valence across individuals. Consequently, if the social identity being measured is not salient to the participant, then the researcher's conclusions about the relationship between the development of that identity and well-being or self-esteem may not be accurate. The current study supports this speculation in that the results indicated no difference in self-esteem and life satisfaction when participants identified with different social identities to varying degrees. Thus, when researchers examine only a single social identity, a critical and initial step should be to measure the salience of that social identity in an individual's self-concept.

A second key finding related to how the results provided ideas on how to modify the Multidimensional Identity Model (Reynolds & Pope, 1991) in order to conceptualize multiple social identities in a more comprehensive manner. The Multidimensional Identity Model (Reynolds & Pope, 1991) was used as a theoretical framework for this study, as certain concepts of the model are helpful in conceptualizing multiple social identities. The Multidimensional Identity Model is a theoretical model that presently does not have empirical evidence supporting its concepts. The current study provides empirical evidence that supports many of the concepts in the Multidimensional Identity Model. Namely, the concepts of the model that were illustrated in the results included internally defined versus societally influenced identity and segmented versus integrated multiple identities. The quantitative results and participants' open ended responses supported these dimensions as being critical components of a conceptual model of

multiple social identities. Although the Multidimensional Identity Model considered an internally defined *single* social identity versus a societally influenced single identity, the study's results suggest this concept should also be applied to *multiple* social identities. Furthermore, the open-ended responses collected in the current study points to additional considerations for the model.

A third key finding was that results showed that although the majority of the participants do not have conflict with their social identities, a number of participants experienced some conflict regarding their social identities. Individuals who identified strongly with many social identities tended to have more conflict than those who identified with social identities to a lesser degree. Although there was no difference regarding life satisfaction for participants who experienced conflict compared to those who did not experience conflict, participants with conflict did have lower self-esteem than those without conflict.

The fourth key finding was that participants perceived society in general to assign visible social identities (e.g., race, gender, and age) more strongly to them than they personally identified with. Additionally, the study results reflected that marginalized social identities were often more salient, which supports the Multidimensional Identity Model and other models of multiple identities (Jones & McEwen, 2000; Reynolds & Pope, 1991). However, the Multidimensional Identity Model's focus on oppressed identity statuses is not sufficient in conceptualizing how multiple social identities are managed. The study's results also revealed that some participants viewed identity statuses usually considered more dominant, such as being Christian or male, as being

salient. Thus, in order to be more comprehensive, the Multidimensional Identity Model should be expanded so that both marginalized and dominant social identity statuses are considered.

The study results regarding salience of social identities, the intersection of multiple social identities, the managing of conflicts associated with the intersection of social identities, the influence of societal views on internal definitions of identity, and the role of context are discussed in depth in the following sections. Participants' responses to the open-ended responses included in the study provide additional information for interpreting their responses to the quantitative results as well as directions for future areas of research and theory development. Where appropriate, these responses are included in discussing the study's results in each of these areas.

### *The Salience of Social Identities*

Although ethnicity, gender, and race were the most salient social identities for the overall sample, the salience of the social identities was by no means uniform across all the participants. There were differences between female and male participants in the salience of certain social identities. Women attributed importance to ethnicity and gender as salient aspects of social identity significantly more than men. The difference in salience of gender may be due to the marginalized status of women in society, which supports the notion of oppressed social identities being more salient than privileged social identities as suggested by McIntosh (2001) and Worthington and Juntunen (1997). However, this does not explain why ethnicity was more salient to women than men. One explanation could be that ethnicity and gender are intertwined, such that Asian American

women may be more aware of stereotypes associated with being, for example, Indian women, Chinese women, Filipina, and so on. Differential experiences for Asian American men compared to Asian American women have been documented extensively (Espiritu, 1996; Kim, E. J., O'Neil, & Owen, 1996; Meston, Trapnell, & Gorzalka, 1996). These experiences include dealing with the hypersexualization of Asian American women and the emasculation of Asian American men by news and entertainment media (Hagedorn, 2000; Mok, 1999). Additionally, cultural expectations by family and community are often tied to gender roles, thus possibly linking salience of ethnicity to salience of gender (Dasgupta, 1998).

Overall, ethnicity, gender, and race were the most salient aspects of social identity for this sample. In order to understand what makes various social identities salient for participants, a consideration of the intersection of social identities is necessary. In the next section, the salience of ethnicity, gender, and race are examined in relation to the social identities of religion, sexual orientation, age, and socioeconomic status.

### *Intersection of Social Identities*

The four clusters of self-identification with social identities reflect multiple ways in which Asian American individuals conceptualized themselves. The clusters varied in degree of salience regarding the importance placed upon the social identities of age, ethnicity, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status. Additionally, the clusters differed with regard to the number of salient social identities.

Cluster 1 did not identify strongly with any of the social identities, and cluster 4 deemed many of the social identities as moderately important. In contrast, clusters 2 and



3 were characterized by high salience of at least three social identities. The relative lack of importance placed on social identities by cluster 1 and moderate importance placed on them by cluster 4 may reflect a stronger emphasis being placed on personal identity, which includes personality and self-esteem. In Jones and McEweirs (2000) qualitative study of ten female college students (consisting of White, Black/African American, Sri Lankan, and Asian Indian backgrounds) regarding multiple dimensions of identity, they reported that “outside identities were easily named by others and interpreted by the participants as less meaningful than the complexities of their inside identities” (p. 408). Thus, social identity statuses may be more important to others compared to cluster 1 individuals.

In clusters 2 and 3, the most salient social identities were ethnicity, gender, and race. These results parallel the focus on the intersections of ethnicity, gender, and race in social science literature regarding the Asian American population (Ancheta, 1998; Bradshaw, 1994; Dasgupta, 1998; Kim, E. J., O'Neil, & Owen, 1996; Sue, 2001). As immigrants make up half of the Asian American population, ethnicity is still a salient aspect of individuals' identity as they negotiate cultural experiences in the U.S. (Kibria, 2000; Lee, S. J., 1999). Additionally, individual acts of racial discrimination and social and political events, such as the Presidential campaign finance scandal of 1996 and terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, make issues of race more salient for some Asian American individuals (Chan, K. S. & Hune, 1995; Fong, 2002). Ethnicity and race are intertwined (Tuan, 1998). As discussed in the previous section, the intersection of gender with race and ethnicity often reflects different experiences for Asian American women

and men, although they are often related to negative stereotypes for both women and men. These stereotypes are often gender-specific and seemingly of a binary nature – e.g., sexual Asian woman versus asexual Asian man and “Dragon Lady” versus nerdy Asian man (although there is also the stereotype of passive, submissive Asian women).

An examination of responses to open-ended questions in the Social Identification Scale provides some initial understanding of the findings in the current study regarding the intersection of social identities. These responses provide insight into what makes certain social identities more salient than others and how participants view the interactions among their social identities. Most of the responses were coded into four possible explanations concerning the salience of social identities. The four possible explanations to consider in understanding salience of social identities based on open-ended responses ( $N = 258$ ) were: Explanation 1 – influence of the social environment (i.e., what others notice); explanation 2 – internal sense of identity; explanation 3 – mixture of influence of the social environment and internal sense of identity, and explanation 4 – common experiences/shared background with members of the same social group. Explanations 1 and 2 somewhat reflect the dimension of passive (externally defined) versus active (internally defined) identification of the Multidimensional Identities Model (Reynolds & Pope, 1991). However, a closer inspection of responses reflecting explanations 3 and 4 reveals that this dimension is more complex than a simple dichotomy of passive/active identification.

The other main dimension of the Multidimensional Identities Model – identification with a single social identity versus multiple social identities – was not as

evident in the open-ended responses. This probably resulted from the questionnaire prompting participants to think about several social identities. Thus, most responses included discussion about multiple social identities, which participants viewed either in a combined fashion (i.e., considering the intersection of multiple social identities) or in a segmented fashion (i.e., considering each social identity singly). Although the view of multiple social identities in a combined fashion is apparent across the four possible explanations as is the view of multiple social identities in a segmented fashion, most open-ended responses did not describe these perspectives in detail. Therefore, the following sections mainly focus on the four possible explanations regarding why participants identified with certain social identities.

*Explanation 1 – Influence of the social environment (i.e., what others notice)*

Some examples of the strong influence of the social environment (explanation 1) reflect how, for some participants, identity was mainly determined by external experiences (the three most salient social identities indicated by each respondent are indicated in brackets before the quote):

[*race, ethnicity, sexual orientation*] Most of my experiences of discrimination and otherness have centered on the above identities. (30-year old gay Filipino male)

[*ethnicity, race, religion*] Because these are the identities that get thrown at me a lot. (21-year old heterosexual Chinese/Taiwanese female)

These quotes highlight how feelings of marginalization can make certain aspects of identity more salient. This supports research indicating that social identities may often be more salient when they are marginalized statuses, such as being a woman and/or a person

of Color (Jones & McEwen, 2000; Reynolds & Pope, 1991). Related to the recognition of difference is the perception of high visibility (usually physical traits) that makes certain social identities more salient:

[*gender, age, ethnicity*] The above three traits are physical traits – I couldn't hide my gender, age, or ethnicity no matter how hard I tried, though I am able to hide my religion, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status to some point. (23-year old heterosexual Chinese/Taiwanese female)

Some individuals indicated that their physical attributes underscored their difference from others, thus making certain social identities (gender, race, ethnicity, age) more salient.

#### *Explanation 2 – Internal sense of identity*

In contrast to responses reflecting a primarily external environmental influence on identity, many participants expressed that their salient social identities were driven by an internal sense of identity (explanation 2):

[*gender, religion, ethnicity*] Gender: defines the way I view myself in relation to others and has been/ is effected [*sic*] by my cultural background. Religion: defines my worldview and approach to life. Ethnicity: defines some cultural values and influences both gender roles and religious exposure. (33-year old heterosexual Indian female)

[*ethnicity, gender, religion*] I value my cultural heritage as an Indian, and part of my cultural background includes identity as a Hindu. My role as an Indian woman also figures into my work and identity a great deal. (40-year old heterosexual Indian female)

[*age, gender, religion*] I think those three affect my decisions the most as where to go, what to do, and what to think. The others don't so much decide how I think, but how others perceive me. At those times I feel the other aspects are important. Other than those times, they are a part of my identity, but don't dictate my actions. (23-year old heterosexual Chinese male)

The previous explanation 2 responses often included references to ethnic culture and religious tradition (as opposed to experiences of difference) as having influence on

individuals' sense of identity. However, the influence of the social environment is not always completely separate from an internal sense of identity.

*Explanation 3 – Mixture of influence of the social environment and internal sense of identity*

For some participants, their social identities were internally defined as well as influenced by societal views. To a degree, the salience of some social identities reflected how participants perceived society as making certain social identities more salient than others. At the same time, participants indicated that certain social identities were personally meaningful to them and not necessarily related to how society views those social identities.

[*gender, race, religion*] My faith is very important to me, and thus is a huge part of where I base my life. Race and gender seem like really huge things in our society and thus I don't see how these wouldn't be big things in my identity – that is our society has kinda pushed me to where these things are super-important whereas I feel like my religion being important to me is more of a self-pushed thing. (25-year old bisexual Chinese female)

[*gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation*] My identity as a male and with my ethnicity [*sic*] is prevalent in the way I look. The presence of my identity as a bisexual-male is present regardless of someone else noticing; it is an identity that is alive and living despite its possible invisibility to others. I make decisions and interpret the world while being cognizant of my sexual orientation. (24-year old bisexual Filipino male)

[*ethnicity, gender, race*] I'm proud of my ethnicity. They're also visible to others, so I sometimes don't have a choice but to think about the identities (because other people bring the identities to my attention). (31-year old heterosexual Vietnamese female)

These examples illustrate an awareness of societal influence on social identity salience in conjunction with internally defined aspects of identity.

*Explanation 4 – Common experiences/shared background with members of the same social group*

The fourth and final explanation reflected how individuals identified with certain aspects of social identity based on common experiences and/or being able to relate to others of a similar background:

[*race, ethnicity, age*] It's easy to relate to others of the same identity in terms of similar family upbringing, common experiences with racism, and wanting to do similar things socially (age). (32-year old heterosexual Chinese male)

[*ethnicity, gender, age*] I feel a commonality with other women and with other Chinese Americans. Since I'm getting older, I'm more worried about my age and I look around to see how other older women are dealing with age. (60-year old heterosexual Chinese female)

Having a shared background or experience seemed to be an important factor in influencing the salience of certain aspects of social identity for many participants.

The profiles of salient social identities varied for the Asian American participants, and there were different perspectives regarding what made them salient. The salience of social identities was discussed in terms of a single social identity as well as the intersection of multiple social identities. The influence of the social environment, an internal sense of identity, a combination of both external and internal influences, and common experiences/shared background characterized the many perspectives given for the varying salience of social identities.

The varying degrees of social identity salience in this Asian American sample point out the within-group differences in how Asian Americans view their identity. Furthermore, there seems to be no significant difference in self-esteem or life satisfaction

among Asian Americans identifying with different aspects of social identity. The diversity in social identity salience reflects the conceptual models of managing multiple social identities in that individuals make sense of social group membership in various ways (Phinney, 1993; Robinson, 1999). Thus, researchers and mental health professionals need to be mindful of assumptions they have regarding which social identities may be meaningful to Asian American individuals with whom they are conducting studies or therapy.

#### *The Managing of Conflicts Associated with the Intersection of Social Identities*

Identifying with multiple social identities caused conflict for many Asian Americans. For the overall sample, 37.1% of participants reported having conflict within themselves about their identities, while 62.9% did not have any conflict about their identities. The female to male ratios of both subgroups were proportional to the ratio in the whole sample (3:1). The open-ended responses regarding conflicts within self were characterized by two general notions: 1) conflict between two social identities, and 2) conflict regarding one social identity. Although the Multidimensional Identities Model (Reynolds & Pope, 1991) conceptualizes multiple ways of identifying with various social identities, it does not address how individuals manage conflict regarding their social identities. Thus, the open-ended responses regarding experiences of conflict provide information in an area that needs more exploration.

#### *Conflicts between Two Social Identities*

Conflicts between two social identities included conflict between gender and other social identities (ethnic culture, race, and religion) and conflict between sexual

orientation and other social identities (ethnic culture, race, and religion). Conflicts around gender and ethnic culture were often intertwined with conflicts around gender and race as these conflicts were often around stereotypes about ethnic culture but based on images of Asian females. These conflicts between gender and culture were all experienced by female participants and involved disagreement with parental/ethnic group expectations regarding marriage, career, and behavior (e.g., being feminine, agreeable, or obedient). The following responses reflect some of these struggles:

[conflict between gender and ethnicity] Growing up in a household where I watched my mother pretty much wait on my father (him doing nothing of housework or cleaning) I find this to be conflicting with my beliefs of being a feminist (i.e., seeking equality). I sometimes notice and catch myself having the mentality that my boyfriend's needs should come before my own, which is traditional of Chinese women. (25-year old heterosexual Chinese female)

[conflict between gender and ethnicity] The main conflict is around my being single – this is viewed as an anomaly and a failure from an Indian culture perspective. I spin this as being independent which has more cultural approval than it used to. (32-year old heterosexual Indian female)

Conflicts such as these have been noted by Asian American scholars and have implications for ethnic identity development (Das Gupta, 1997; Espiritu, 1996; Lim, 1993; Srinivasan, 2001). Although it might be argued that Asian American females may feel less affinity to their ethnicity because of these conflicts, Srinivasan (2001) asserted that ethnic identity does not necessarily mean accepting or expressing traditional cultural behavior or beliefs. Ethnic identity development can be based on attachment to ethnic heritage and not solely on adhering to cultural traditions, as those are constantly being transformed with time. Thus, although conflict exists for some Asian American women



regarding their ethnic culture, this should not automatically lead to the assumption that their ethnic identity is less “achieved.”

Conflicts with gender and race often surrounded the struggle that many women of Color face – i.e., feeling torn between fighting racism and fighting sexism. For example, the following respondent felt it was a “no-win” situation:

[conflict between gender and race] An example would be race and gender. I am very active on campus, but I often feel like I have to choose between representing my people or representing my gender. To represent my gender would be viewed as creating division within my race. But to place my race before my gender is just imposing the same kind of oppression. (21-year old heterosexual Chinese/Vietnamese female)

To be a feminist woman of Color has its challenges, and the support of men of Color in fighting sexism is important in dealing with these challenges (hooks, 1995). Having White allies to aid in fighting racism is also essential.

Another common conflict between social identities was the conflict between gender and religion. Feminist ideals often clashed with traditional religious values:

[conflict between gender and religion] My religious upbringing sometimes conflicts with my gender. I am politically liberal, pro-choice, and independent and that conflicts with my conservative, Korean, Christian upbringing. (28-year old heterosexual Korean female)

These conflicts occurred for both Christian and Hindu women. The feminist ideals participants described in their responses are reflective of certain U.S. cultural and social views. In a sense, then, the conflict is between cultural notions of gender roles and specific religious notions of gender roles. However, participants experienced this as a conflict between their gender and religious identities.

In a few cases, participants experienced conflict among several social identities. The conflicts were based on personal experiences as well as an understanding of social justice issues. Many of these cases involved conflicts with sexual orientation, ethnicity, race, and religion:

[conflict among race, sexual orientation, and ethnicity] As an Asian American gay man, I experience a good deal of conflict around integrating my identity. Mainly, it occurs in White gay circles that are incredibly racist. To a lesser extent, my ethnicity can cause conflict with sexual orientation as well in that I sometimes find myself in the closet around family gatherings...but I have largely made peace with this dilemma. (31-year old gay Vietnamese male)

[conflict among sexual orientation, religion, and ethnicity] Both sides of my family come from a long line of born-again Christians. My mother is a fundamental Evangelic Christian who doesn't accept my sexual orientation, or choice, as she puts it. Her values as a Korean mother in a different country as well as her religious views cause great conflict in our lives. My feminism also doesn't sit well with my family since they believe in the traditional role of women. (26-year old lesbian Korean female)

In the first example, the participant reflected on personal experiences and saw how larger social forces (i.e., racism, homophobia) caused him discomfort regarding the intersection of his social identities. In the second example, a combination of religious and Korean values rejecting the respondent's sexual orientation created conflict for her.

Another instance of dealing with conflict among several identities reflected more of the respondent's struggle with defining her personal values and beliefs (as opposed to others' treatment of her):

[conflict among religion, race, and gender] The primary conflict this causes within me is on social justice issues. On the issue of homosexual marriage, my religion tells me to believe in opposing it, however, my experience as a racial and gender oppressed individual leads me to support it. (26-year old heterosexual Chinese female)

In this example, the participant extrapolated from her personal experiences and broadened her understanding of oppression to include heterosexism in addition to sexism and racism even though she is not directly affected by heterosexism as a heterosexual. However, this understanding of social justice issues deviated from her religious teachings and caused her conflict. Conflicts among multiple social identities occurred for many participants, but some participants experienced conflict primarily with one social identity.

#### *Conflict regarding One Social Identity*

The second notion regarding conflicts within self was related to one particular social identity for certain participants. The conflicts regarding one social identity involved conflict with one's own religion, ethnic cultural values or traditions, and racial group. For instance, conflict with one's own religion was related to disparity between one's beliefs and some of the views or images associated with a specific religion:

Being a heterosexual Christian woman but having many gay/lesbian friends, my more liberal Christian views conflict with more Traditional/Conservative Christian views at church. I have a difficult time going to church these days due to the oppression against homosexuals in the name of God. I choose to understand, not judge. (31-year old heterosexual Korean female)

For example, on 9/11, after the horror, my first thought was please don't let it be a Muslim. I am overwhelmed with carrying the burden of being Muslim which goes above and beyond being horrified at the events of the tragedy. (25-year old heterosexual Pakistani female)

In the first example, a heterosexual Christian woman did not agree with her church's views on homosexuality. In the second example, a Pakistani Muslim woman had conflict with the stereotypes of her religion being confirmed by the terrorist attacks of September

11, 2001. Other conflicts revolved around stereotypes or perceptions of one's own ethnic or racial group:

For instance, it may be said that Chinese people are rather secretive and manipulative. This creates conflict since I consider myself very open and straight forward. I despise corruption and dishonesty of any sort and it thoroughly irritates me when I learn that some individual in the Chinese community has been found to have committed some unethical act either for economic or political gain. Since I relate very strongly to my ethnic Chinese heritage, it creates shame and humiliation for me since I think it reflects badly on the entire Chinese community. (41-year old heterosexual Chinese male)

Assumptions and misunderstandings of Asian American socioeconomic conditions, and my feeling that many Asian Americans willingly aspire to 'whiteness' thereby act in opposition to social and political conditions that promote equity. I am disappointed more Asians don't identify their role in society with causes that are publicized or ascribed to Black and Latinos. (33-year old heterosexual Korean female)

Conflicts with one social identity seemed to be a matter of participants experiencing discomfort with being associated with the stereotypes and assumptions linked to one of their social groups. In contrast, those participants having conflict among multiple social identities experienced tension regarding competing values or beliefs of various social groups.

#### *How Participants Manage Conflicts*

In response to the question of how they managed these conflicts, participants listed a range of strategies. While some participants talk with their friends or therapist about their inner conflicts about identity, others try to make sense of the intersections of their social identities on their own. Some individuals envisioned their identity as

segmented – depending on the context, they would sometimes pick and choose which of their social identities was most salient:

I tend to pick and choose what's right for me when a specific conflict arises, but I don't have a set policy for managing conflicts in general. (28-year old heterosexual Korean female)

Another respondent explained how he balances his ethnic cultural values and his disagreement with his parents' religion:

Culture switching. You turn off one part of your identity when you are in a situation that doesn't support it. (26-year old bisexual Filipino male)

Managing one social identity at a time seemed to be a strategy that was useful in dealing with conflicts among social identities.

However, some participants did not like feeling as if they had to choose one social identity as more salient or more important than another social identity. One college student respondent discussed feeling torn between choosing her involvement in campus groups dealing with racial versus gender issues (and feeling that they did not overlap):

I try to not suppress one over the other. I don't really know. I feel like I'm just doing the best I can in creating a holistic identity that doesn't require me to choose one or another. I don't know how successful I am though. (21-year old heterosexual Vietnamese/Chinese female)

In this example, the college student did not want to split her identity into various compartments and tried to make sense of how her multiple social identities could come together to create a whole self-concept. Another respondent described leading a segmented life:

[Regarding conflict between culture and gender] I often feel like I lead a double life – one that my parents are aware of, and another that I lead when I am away at school. The geographical

separation is substantial, so I am able to do so. (23-year old heterosexual Chinese/Taiwanese female)

Having to manage multiple identities appeared to cause discomfort for some participants as they felt they were unable to express themselves in a holistic manner.

In contrast, others have managed conflicts among their multiple identities by trying to ignore or avoid their inner conflicts:

Interesting question. I'm not sure I do manage it, I think I ignore it most of the time. (21-year old lesbian Indian)

I mean, sometimes it seems I just hide the conflict or espouse the appropriate views with the appropriate audience. But, I am also adept at handling arguments because I have such a balancing act in my own life. (22-year old heterosexual Indian/Pakistani male)

Thus, although some participants are aware of having conflicts among their social identities, they do not necessarily actively manage them.

Based on the various responses, the participants who do try to manage their conflicts seem to expend some amount of psychological energy and effort in making decisions about their behaviors. The majority of participants reported having no conflict with their social identities though. One possible reason is that conflict with multiple social identities is not a common discussion topic, so this issue may not be very salient for many participants. Furthermore, experiencing conflicts may be a developmental issue where older individuals may possibly experience less conflict regarding their identity as they may have already worked out their identity conflicts. The sample included many individuals in the field of psychology, which may have aided those participants in dealing with identity conflicts prior to participating in the study. Another possible reason is that

the term “conflict” has a negative connotation, and participants may not want to discuss their social identities with a critical voice. Lastly, a possible reason for lack of identity conflict is that some individuals experience their various social identities as assets and not barriers in a diverse society (Trueba, 2002).

The way people manage conflicts among social identities and the impact on their psychological well-being are important topics for further study as there might be counseling implications for strategies of managing multiple identities. Managing conflicts regarding social identities has not been examined in psychological literature extensively and is an area of future research that needs expansion.

#### *The Influence of Societal Views on Internal Definitions of Identity*

The results of the Social Group Identification scale revealed that, overall, participants perceived society as assigning most strongly the social identities of race, gender, and ethnicity to them. The aspect of social identity that was perceived to be assigned to them the least strongly by society was religion. The four clusters of perceived societal view of participants’ social identities reflected multiple ways in which Asian American individuals perceived society as assigning social group memberships to them. In general, the participants perceived society associating social identities to them in a manner different from how they viewed themselves.

Cluster 1 perceived society as attributing group membership to them to a moderate degree regarding gender, race, socioeconomic status, age, and ethnicity but not emphasizing sexual orientation or religion too much. Participants in all the other clusters (2, 3, and 4) perceived society to assign at least one of their social identities strongly to

them. Cluster 2 individuals perceived society as assigning race most strongly to them, then ethnicity, gender, and religion, and moderately so age, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status. For Cluster 3, most aspects of social identity were perceived to be assigned very strongly to them by society with the exception of religion, which was viewed as being moderately associated with them. Individuals in cluster 3 seemed to be quite conscious of multiple social categories and may possibly be concerned about the stereotypes and generalizations associated with those categories. Cluster 4 individuals identified race, ethnicity, and gender as the social identities they perceived society to assign most strongly to them. This may be reflective of the focus of current discourses around multicultural issues to be on race and gender. More specifically in the Asian American community, ethnicity is often a salient issue because many individuals are immigrants or children of immigrants.

Participants perceived society as assigning the social groups of age, ethnicity, gender, race, and socioeconomic status more strongly to their identity than they did themselves. There was no difference between participants' self-identification and their perception of society's views regarding sexual orientation. However, participants identified with their religion more strongly than they perceived society as assigning their religion to them. These results support the notion that society often associate more visible social identities, especially if they represent marginalized statuses, to individuals than not-so-visible social identities (Cross, 1987; Robinson, 1999).

Participants generally perceived that certain social identities (i.e., race, ethnicity, gender, age, and socioeconomic status) were assigned to them more strongly by society



than they personally identified with. Thus, they seemed to identify with those social identities out of necessity in that they recognized that others would make certain social identities more salient and behave according to their assumptions of what those social identities meant. Open-ended responses to a series of questions about how society's standards and values affect the way participants identify with their social groups provided some explanation regarding the influence of societal views.

Because of the ways Asian Americans are constructed as a monolithic race and treated that way by society, I am very aware of my racial identity. Ethnic identity is more of a self-constructed awareness. I am also always struggling against gender roles which heightens my awareness of my gender. (26-year old heterosexual Korean female)

Because race is imposed on me by society, I have come to the awareness that my experiences are strongly shaped by it. I have been forced to make sense of being different in this society. (31-year old gay Vietnamese male)

I feel that I face a lot of ageism in society. My age really isn't an identity that I am truly invested in, but because I am discriminated because of it, I feel that I have to defend it. Being a young professional I feel that I always have to show them my worth, but I still do not adopt age as a huge component of who I am. (24-year old heterosexual Korean female)

In these examples, participants discussed how they felt they had to respond to societal views in one way or another – in the first two cases, the participants incorporated racial identity more into their personal identity; in the third case, the participant acknowledged defending herself but did not incorporate age as an important aspect of her personal identity.

Some participants noted that they just wanted others to recognize their individuality and not to automatically attribute behaviors or personality to one's ethnicity

or sex:

I feel that sometimes if I am doing something out of the ordinary, either good or bad, people will attribute it to my ethnicity first rather than attributing it to me as an individual. Such things as driving haphazardly on a road or checking the prices on grocery items. I think people might attribute bad driving or frugality to being Taiwanese rather than me being a crazy person. (23-year old heterosexual Taiwanese female)

This respondent was quite conscious of people's tendency to associate things to her demographic characteristics based on stereotypes and assumptions about those social group categories. Related to this awareness, some participants described how they felt they had to prove people's stereotypes wrong and sometimes overcompensate as a result:

Society's standards may affect me in that I choose to try to go against societal stereotypes and assumptions, assert my own sense of individuality, and surround myself with people who are diverse and have an acceptance and appreciation for diversity. (18-year old heterosexual Vietnamese male)

I feel that I tend to be even more aggressive to overcompensate for my perception that society tends to view me as weak or feminine. (24-year old heterosexual Cambodian/Chinese/Laotian male)

Society views Asian women as shy, retiring, confused, easily tricked, reticent and subservient... My persona is deliberately brusque, confrontative [*sic*], verbal and contrary. It is in accordance with my personality also. (45-year old heterosexual Korean/Japanese/Chinese female)

Thus, many participants reacted to societal views, which were often derogatory in their stereotypic assumptions, by maintaining a sense of individuality or behaving in a manner opposite of the stereotypes. Although the third respondent commented that her behavior fit her personality anyway (and implied that her reaction to societal views did not create

her personality), another respondent indicated it was difficult to sort out the effects of societal influence from her personal experience:

Being Filipino-American and raised in a predominantly catholic community, I think there has always been the pressure to succeed and do well in school... You had to be a good and obedient child and respectful at all times. And so in that sense, I did conform and become that person... But is it because of my parents and family upbringing or is it because of how society identifies Filipino Americans? It is difficult to say. (31-year old heterosexual Filipina female)

For this respondent, she was unsure if she conformed to societal stereotypes of being a studious Filipina American or if she was taught to be studious by her parents' family culture. In this sense, it was difficult for her to separate societal influences from personal influences of family values.

Other participants wrote about the process of how societal standards and values *used to* affect them. As they grew older and became more educated, they relearned how to appreciate and be proud of their ethnic heritage, racial category, etc. In these instances, participants redefined what it meant to them to be Korean, Asian American, etc.:

Before I had the opportunity to learn about how people in the US constructed race, gender, and sexuality, society's views had a great negative influence on my identity. After I learned these lessons, I was able to disown those views that society has of Asian Americans. (29-year old heterosexual Chinese male)

Moreover, some participants recognized that they had internalized negative messages about their social identities and had to redefine values and standards for themselves:

Overcoming internalized messages of racism as a person of color; overcoming internalized messages of homophobia among LGBT people; overcoming perceptions of what is attractive within a predominately White LGBT community. (26-year old gay Filipino male)

In these instances, individuals who relearned or redefined values and beliefs regarding their marginalized social identities were intentional in creating their own new understanding of those social identities.

The visibility of characteristics associated with social identities also had an effect on many participants. For some biracial/multiracial individuals, figuring out their racial and ethnic identities was difficult because others did not view them (literally and figuratively) as being Asian Americans:

Our society is so rigid that each group is so selective. For instance in schools, you have the Asian group...the Latino group, the Black group, and the White group. I often felt like is there a place in society for somebody like me who is of mixed race? I strongly identify with my Japanese roots because I was raised by a Japanese mother from Japan; however because I don't look Asian at all (I look Latino), the Asian community has always considered me an outsider. (23-year old heterosexual Japanese/Brazilian female)

Similarly, some adoptees experienced discomfort as they felt others assumed or expected them to be a certain way based on their looks, but they did not fit those expectations:

My group seems to have some stereotypes that cast me in a positive light: smart, driven, hard-worker. However, as an adoptee, these values become something else entirely: lost, cultureless...Being a Korean Adoptee is different than society views me. I was raised as a cultural white however, I am relentlessly asked questions like, Are you from this country? by perfect strangers...I used to resent it, but now I educate people. (26-year old heterosexual Korean female)

For this respondent, the discomfort seemed to be related to a sense of loss in that her (White American) cultural upbringing did not match others' assumptions about her, and she felt somehow she was supposed to be different from what she was.

Some participants discussed having to deal with stereotypes regarding the intersection of multiple social identities. For instance, the following respondents indicated having to deal with gendered racial stereotypes:

There are stereotypes of Asian American women as being passive, submissive... exotic, etc. When I am in a new social situation, I make an effort to be *[sic]* to voice an opinion, be assertive...This contrasts with my preferred way of being, which is more relaxed and oriented to the collective and maintaining a sense of harmony...I have found that if I do this just once, then I am treated in a more respectful way. During the times that I have not taken the time to display these skills, people have sometimes begun speaking for me, etc. (38-year old heterosexual Chinese female)

I can go on about the plight of the Asian American male. We're on the bottom of the racial totem pole in terms of possessing any desirable features, physically, stereotypically, or whatever...we only exist as skinny-ass rice-rocket videogamers and somehow we all know kung fu...the way that this societal view affects me and my social groups is that although I'm an Asian-American male, I tend to shy away from things that are typically associated with Asians...I feel pressure to shatter their preconception of the Uber-Smart, Dutiful Asian Son, mainly because falling under that stereotype and being written off as a typical Asian boy pisses me off. (24-year old heterosexual Chinese male)

In these examples, the gender and racial identities could not be separated for the respondents as the stereotypes were quite specifically linked to both race and gender. Additionally, the respondents felt they had to prove the stereotypes wrong in order to be taken seriously (i.e., respected by others).

On the other hand, some participants indicated that they try not to let societal views affect them in terms of how they view their identity:

I actually don't very often think of myself as being different from other people who are not Asian. Therefore, I am not affected by society's standards very much, even though they may identify me as being Asian more than I do. (27-year old heterosexual Chinese female)

Because, really, who cares about socioeconomic status? And it doesn't matter if you're a girl or a guy. Everybody is the same. The only difference between people is set by culture and religion... I don't care what others think. I know what I am. Do I need to seek anything external to validate myself? Am I so dumb that I can't decide for myself? Am I so insecure that others can determine what I truly am? Does it matter that there are negative stereotypes of my social groups? It doesn't affect what I actually am. It's the same as being insulted in the 1st grade: it's most likely not true, and if it's not true, then why is it a big deal? Their mistake, not mine. (23-year old heterosexual Chinese male)

The second respondent seemed offended that it was even suggested that one could be affected by the social environment. His response indicated that he feels an internal sense of self is much more important than external messages from society.

Although they varied in their reasoning and understanding of social issues, many participants asserted they tried not to let society's standards affect their self-identity and thus, experienced little conflict regarding social identities. In order to reinforce this approach, many of these individuals did not want to associate with certain groups (specifically, other Asian Americans) for fear of perpetuating stereotypes of congregating only with one's own kind.

While some Asian American participants attempted to manage conflict between societal views and their self-identity through productive channels, such as writing, talking with friends, educating others, some did not feel free to struggle with their conflict in a constructive manner and felt silenced by their attempts to engage in discussions regarding their social identities. In the following example, the respondent attempted to engage in discussions regarding her conflicts but ultimately felt silenced and dismissed:

I was a theatre major in college, and there were probably a total of ten...Asian Americans ...Naturally, I was usually the only Asian American in an extremely white-dominated classroom.

When it came to topics of race, I had a difficult time explaining how I felt about issues. I felt like everyone tried to shoot down my opinions and that they were saying, I think you're just thinking too much. By the end of the semester, I hardly even talked in class because I felt like I was just wasting my time. Why should I have to give personal experiences/opinions if no one is going to listen to them anyways?? (23-year old heterosexual Japanese female)

Whether individuals ignored societal views or dealt with them in some way or another, it appears that most Asian Americans expend some amount of psychological energy to shut out external messages, prove others wrong, develop an inner sense of self, and/or be calm and understanding of others.

### *The Role of Context*

Social identity salience can depend on the context (i.e., social, cultural, and political environment). Depending on the context, some aspects of identity may be more salient than others. Rotheram and Phinney (1987) noted that changes in the “sociocultural milieu” also influence identity salience. For example, in the 1960s, the “Black is beautiful” movement encouraged Blacks to be proud of their identity as Blacks; this in turn influenced the salience of this aspect of identity. Cass (1979) also noted that the context of time is important to consider in that theoretical models of identity development may need to change over time as social attitudes and conventions change. In Jones and McEwen’s (2000) conceptual model of multiple social identities, the core identity (i.e., personal identity) interacts with fluid and dynamic aspects of social identity within changing contexts, which included family background, sociocultural conditions, and career decisions.

In a study with Asian American females, Shih, Pittinsky, and Ambady (1999) examined how stereotypes about females and Asian Americans influenced math performance. They suggested that salience of social identity for Asian Americans depended on the social context, which would prime different social identities given the nature of the situation. Two conditions were presented – one in which the stereotype threat of females having lower math aptitude was introduced, and the other in which a stereotype “boost” as Asian Americans on a mathematical task was created (Shih, Pittinsky, & Ambady, 1999). The Asian American female participants performed better when their Asian American identity was made more salient than their gender identity. In a related study, Pittinsky, Shih, and Ambady (1999) investigated identity adaptiveness (i.e., shifting social identity salience) in different situations. The results of the study suggest that social contexts priming social identities to be salient can have effects on affect related to social identification, especially if stereotypes exist for those social identities.

Several participants in the current study indicated that they viewed their social identities differently based on different social contexts. Entering a particular occupational field made certain social identities more salient for the following respondent:

I am very aware of being an Asian American woman. I never used to think twice about it, but there's something about law school that's changed that. In my interactions with my profs, the admin, opposing counsel, judges, other classmates, I am aware of stereotypes they may have of Asian American women and for the most part I try not to conform to them. For example: in law school, many of the Asian American women are seen as quiet, shy, meek, \*sweet\*, petite, giggly, etc. The stereotypes sicken me and the women who perpetuate them irritate me. (26-year old heterosexual Korean female)



In this example, not only did the participant become more aware of stereotypes about Asian American women; she also was disturbed by people who seemed to emulate those stereotypical images. Similarly, Asian American students may behave differently and have a different level of self-efficacy based on the make-up of their classes. For example, they may feel more comfortable speaking in an Asian American Studies course than in a course mainly comprised of white students.

A shift in geographical location – primarily a change in racial and ethnic diversity – also prompted many participants to think about race and ethnicity in more salient ways:

*[race, ethnicity, gender]* These are the top three ways I am viewed. The actions of others impact how I see myself. When living in Los Angeles, I didn't particularly identify racially/ethnically first. There were always Asians and Chinese around me, but moving to a place that is primarily white affected me. All of a sudden, I began thinking of myself as a racial being because I was being treated as such – as an other. So many times being asked where I was from or to explain my nationality and culture. I began to feel like an Other and have now embraced it as a sense of resistance and pride. (40-year old heterosexual Chinese female)

Similar to the previous respondent's experience, the following respondent indicated that social identity salience was affected by many contextual considerations – geography, racial diversity, and others' attitudes and knowledge about Asian Americans:

Society's standards and values definitely affect the way I identify with social groups. Some factors that influence my identity is largely determined by my environment, geography of where I live, the percentage of other Asian Americans or Filipino in my immediate surroundings, and the views, knowledge, and exposure that individuals may or may not have about Asian Americans or Filipinos. (32-year old heterosexual Filipina female)

These examples illustrate how many Asian Americans shift their behaviors and attitudes related to their social identities based on social situations, geographical location, and

others' identity development. Thus, their social identities had different levels of salience depending on the context (e.g., family function, work, geographical location).

### *Counseling Implications*

The current study's results have several counseling implications for mental health professionals who work with Asian American clients. As most Asian Americans attribute varying meanings and importance to their social identities, mental health professionals need to assess the salience of various social identities of their Asian American clients in addition to assessing their identity development regarding those social groups (e.g., ethnic identity, racial identity). Many theoretical discussions have suggested that mental health professionals consider the intersection of multiple social identities when working with clients (Greene, 2000; Hurtado, 1997). The current study's results support these theoretical models; as such, mental health professionals need to recognize that some Asian Americans may identify with multiple social identities, often simultaneously. The results of the current study suggest that the intersections of social identities occur in different combinations across racial, ethnic, gender, religious, sexual, class, and age group identities. Thus, it would be helpful for mental health professionals to assess the salience of various social identities in their initial evaluation of clients' concerns and to be aware of their own experiences and identity statuses that may bias their perspective (Reynolds & Pope, 1991; Robinson, 1999). This means that mental health professionals need to actively obtain a comprehensive understanding of their clients' view of their multiple social identities by inquiring about their identity development processes and the social contexts in which they occurred.

Managing multiple social identities can create conflict for some Asian Americans, so this may also be an important area for therapeutic focus and intervention, as it appears that much psychological energy is spent on dealing with conflicts. Some conflicts reflect struggles between competing sets of values and beliefs while other conflicts are related to divergence from values and beliefs (whether cultural or stereotypical in nature) associated with certain social identity statuses. When individuals experience conflict with their social identities, they use various strategies to cope – some of which are constructive while others are more maladaptive. At the same time, for many Asian Americans, there is little conflict regarding their social identities, so it should not be assumed that an identity struggle exists for all Asian Americans. Mental health professionals should be mindful of the possibility of conflicts regarding social identity when working with clients of diverse backgrounds. When clients are experiencing conflict, mental health professionals need to acknowledge the difficulty of experiencing internal conflict with social identities that are not easily mutable and understand how much clients value their various social identities (e.g., ethnic culture, religion, *and* gender). Additionally, mental health professionals should be noting adaptive coping strategies that are part of the clients' strengths as well as maladaptive coping strategies that are causing the clients distress.

Mental health professionals also need to recognize the influences of societal messages – usually produced by dominant culture – about various social groups on individuals' identity development. Given the discrepancy seen between participants' self-view of identity and their perception of societal views of them, it is important to

explore how individuals manage their self-identification with social identities within a social context, which may attach different valences to those social identities. Costalat-Founeau (1999) discussed how social representations influence individuals' subjective representation of themselves. More specifically, media representations of Asian Americans may impact how Asian American individuals conceptualize their self-identity as well as how non-Asian Americans view them. Media images paint a narrow picture of Asian Americans, which can lead to overgeneralizations and stereotypes (Espiritu, 1996; Fong, 2002; Mok, 1999). Thus, mental health professionals need to be aware that Asian Americans necessarily have to deal with, on some level, societal views on what is believed to be "the Asian/Asian American experience" (even if it is dealt with by deciding not to let societal views affect them).

#### *Limitations of the Current Study*

The sample of the current study was self-selected since individuals only participated if they were interested in the study based on the recruitment e-mail, which requested Asian American participants. This could be a restricting factor in getting a full range of Asian American perspectives because the sample would be limited to individuals who did not mind being identified as Asian American. Additionally, because the current study targeted an Asian American sample, participants may have been primed to think more about race and ethnicity – two characteristics often studied when Asian American participants are specifically sought to participate in research.

The majority of participants were women (73.9%), which may be reflective of the study recruiting from the fields of psychology and higher education (via list-servs),

disciplines which tend to consist of more women than men. As a result, the perspectives obtained in this study reflect mostly those of women, and men's perspectives may not be as broadly represented. Moreover, the sample consisted of a large proportion of individuals with graduate degrees in the fields of education and psychology. Thus, the results may be skewed as the participants are highly educated and may have more awareness of social justice issues and the luxury of contemplating such issues. Having a disproportionate amount of highly educated participants also possibly limited the range of socioeconomic statuses represented. Future research on multiple social identities need to include participants representing a diverse sample of social identity statuses across race, ethnicity, religion, gender, socioeconomic status, age, and sexual orientation. In this way, a research-based theoretical model could be developed for diverse populations.

Another limitation of the study is related to the measure of social identity salience, which was based on single-item self-report scales. Self-report data is limited by participants' interpretation of the questionnaire items; thus, some participants may have responded based on an understanding different from what was intended in the questionnaire. Although participants' responses to open-ended questions included in the study supported the reliability of the single-item scales in the current study, more extensive quantitative measures of social identity salience need to be developed and validated in order to examine social identity salience more empirically.

The current study utilized the internet to recruit participants, so the sample was limited to individuals with technological knowledge and access to computers and the internet. However, making the questionnaire available on-line allowed the study sample

to include a diverse range of ages and geographic locations in comparison to traditional studies targeting university undergraduate students. A recent comparison of on-line psychological studies to traditional psychological studies suggested that even self-selected internet samples tended to be more diverse than samples in traditional studies, although challenges still exist in obtaining samples representative of the general population (Gosling, Vazire, Srivastava, & John, 2004). Another possible limitation of conducting on-line studies is that the presentation format of the questionnaire (e.g., paper-and-pencil questionnaire versus computer screen questionnaire) may affect the findings. However, initial research indicates that differences in presentation format does not significantly affect the quality of the data (Fouladi, McCarthy, & Moller, 2002; Gosling et al., 2004). Additionally, preliminary research provides evidence that results from on-line psychological studies on personality development are consistent with results of traditional psychological studies on personality development (Gosling et al., 2004). Suggestions on addressing the limitations of on-line psychological research include: conducting pilot tests, considering additional methods of data collection, utilizing internet technology to reduce fraudulent data, and utilizing computer programs to check for questionable data patterns (Kraut, Olson, Banaji, Bruckman, Cohen, & Couper, 2004).

#### *Directions for Future Research*

In future research on Asian Americans and social identities, samples that are more reflective of the Asian American population are desirable. More specifically, greater representation of different Asian ethnic groups is needed, especially of Filipina/o Americans and Indian Americans as they are the second and third most populous Asian

ethnic groups in the U.S. (Barnes & Bennett, 2002), yet they are often overlooked in research on Asian Americans. Future research should also aim to have a sample with a more balanced ratio of male and female participants to reflect the population more accurately. The current sample consisted of a disproportionate amount of women and was not representative of the Asian American population. Additionally, a sample including participants with a wider range of socioeconomic statuses (e.g., more diverse educational backgrounds) would be helpful in tapping into socioeconomic class identity issues in a deeper manner.

As salience of social identities varies among individuals, social identity development research needs to routinely assess the salience of the social identities being measured in order to paint a more accurate picture. Furthermore, there needs to be more systematic research on how social identity salience is related to different social contexts. The findings of the current study point to the importance of considering the intersection of multiple social identities when researching identity issues. Future research should continue to develop measures of multiple social identities, using mixed qualitative and quantitative methodologies, in order to gain a more holistic understanding of the intersection of social identities. The current study examined the salience and intersections of various social identities; future research should examine *identity development* of the various social identities and how they interact with each other within a social context.

Although the sample of the current study focused on Asian Americans, the implications seem applicable to all social groups as they all have within-group diversity.

More specifically, within-group diversity is important to consider when working with marginalized social groups as psychological research on communities of Color, women, and gay and lesbian individuals often tend to concentrate only on that one particular marginalized social identity. The findings of the current study suggest that researchers and mental health professionals alike should consider the intersection of multiple social identities and identity salience when studying and working with individuals from diverse social groups. In addition, discussion about multicultural competence indicates that considering individuals as operating in multiple cultural contexts is important (Constantine, 2002; Neville & Mobley, 2001).

Although participants' responses to the study's open-ended questions did not describe in detail the concepts of segmented versus integrated multiple social identities, they did indicate that managing multiple social identities was often dynamic in nature. Instead of conceptualizing multiple social identities categorically as the Multidimensional Identity Model does, a dynamic model seems more appropriate in understanding how individuals manage their multiple social identities. For example, Jones and McEwen's (2000) conceptual model of multiple social identities viewed individuals as having dynamic social identities that interact with their personal core identity. Other scholars have suggested using a narrative approach – based on a constructivist perspective – rather than a developmental stage approach (Grotevant, 1993; Yi & Shorter-Gooden, 1999). A constructivist approach allows for the integration of identities into a cohesive sense of self, which traditional stage models do not address (e.g., Fassinger & Miller, 1996; Helms, 1995; Phinney, Lochner, & Murphy, 1990). The constructivist narrative model



favors a “constructed” self that considers the influence of past experiences and current social context on identity development over an “essentialist notion of the self,” which is assumed in the stage models (Yi & Shorter-Gooden, 1999). Additionally, “healthy” identity development is not assumed from a constructivist narrative approach in contrast to stage models of identity development. Further exploration of the dynamic nature of social identity salience and development in different contexts would greatly add to the literature on identity development as well as multicultural counseling.

### *Conclusion*

The current study tested an existing theoretical model on multiple social identities, the Multidimensional Identity Model (Reynolds & Pope, 1991), as well as provided suggestions for modifying the model to include other concepts regarding multiple social identities. The results of this study provided empirical evidence supporting some of the concepts of the Multidimensional Identity Model in that Asian Americans identified with multiple social identities to varying degrees (i.e., salience for the social identities varied among individuals). Additionally, the intersection of multiple social identities was evident in the self-definition of Asian Americans. Furthermore, the study expanded on the Multidimensional Identity Model in that the influence of the social environment was shown to be an important consideration for individuals identifying with *multiple* social identities; the model considers social influence only for individuals identifying with a single identity. Another consideration based on the study results is to modify the Multidimensional Identity Model to include privileged as well as oppressed social identity statuses. The results indicated that conflict existed for some Asian

Americans regarding their social identities; thus, this is another area that needs to be incorporated in the Multidimensional Identity Model.

Areas of future research include developing more comprehensive quantitative measures to assess how individuals manage multiple social identities, how conflict regarding social identities affects individuals, and how social context affects social identity salience. Additionally, future research should also examine the intersection of multiple social identities in terms of individuals' identity development regarding the various social identities within diverse social contexts. As this is a burgeoning field of research, it would be useful to have more empirical evidence in these areas in order to explore the intersection of multiple social identities more thoroughly.

## APPENDICES

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## APPENDIX A

### Recruitment E-mail

Hello,

My name is Grace Chen, and I am a doctoral student working on my dissertation in the Counseling Psychology Program at the University of Texas at Austin.

If you are 18 years of age or older and identify yourself as Asian American, please consider participating in this dissertation study – The Complexity of “Asian American Identity”: Intersection of Multiple Identities (IRB #2004-3-57). I am interested in examining the ways that Asian Americans think about different aspects of their identity (e.g., regarding age, ethnicity, gender, race, religion, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation).

If you choose to participate in this web-based study, it will take about 20-25 minutes of your time. As a participant in this study, you are eligible to win one of four gift certificates (\$25 for an on-line bookstore) when you send a separate e-mail to the researcher at [g.chen@mail.utexas.edu](mailto:g.chen@mail.utexas.edu). This e-mail will not be linked to your responses in any way.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please click on the following link which will provide more information and the survey:  
<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.asp?u=57998432128>

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Clarke A. Burnham, Ph.D., Chair, The University of Texas at Austin Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, 512/232-4383.

Thank you!

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## APPENDIX B

### *Informed Consent to Participate in Research*

#### **The University of Texas at Austin**

You are being asked to participate in a research study. This form provides you with information about the study. The Principal Investigator (the person in charge of this research) or his/her representative will also describe this study to you and answer all of your questions. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything you don't understand before deciding whether or not to take part. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you can refuse to participate without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

#### **Title of Research Study:**

The Complexity of "Asian American Identity": Intersection of Multiple Social Identities

#### **Principal Investigator(s) (include faculty sponsor), UT affiliation, and Telephone Number(s):**

Grace A. Chen, Doctoral Candidate, Dept. of Educational Psychology, (512) 342-8842  
Lucia Gilbert, Ph.D., Professor, Dept. of Educational Psychology, (512) 232-3310  
Michele Guzmán, Ph.D. Assistant Professor, Dept. of Educational Psychology, (512) 471-0374

#### **Funding source:**

N/A

#### **What is the purpose of this study?**

The purpose of this study is to examine how Asian Americans identify with age, ethnicity, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status. You have been invited to participate in this study because you have indicated that you consider yourself to be Asian American. The anticipated number of participants for this study is 200.

#### **What will be done if you take part in this research study?**

This study consists of filling out several questionnaires and will take about 20-25 minutes to answer. The questionnaires ask about attitudes and beliefs about issues related to identity and are not difficult to answer. There are no right or wrong answers.

**What are the possible discomforts and risks?**

The questions in the study may elicit minor psychological distress as a result of participating in this study. If at any time you feel uncomfortable, you may withdraw from the study without penalty. If you wish to discuss the information above or any other risks you may experience, you may ask questions now or call one of the Principal Investigators listed on the front page of this form. Should you feel any discomfort as a result of participating in this study, please contact the researchers for a list of resources.

**What are the possible benefits to you or to others?**

By participating in this study, you will be helping add to the research in psychology on Asian Americans, a group that is often overlooked in studies. The responses you provide regarding your identity will aid us in gaining a better understanding of Asian American individuals.

**If you choose to take part in this study, will it cost you anything?**

If you choose to participate in this study, it will take about 20-25 minutes of your time.

**Will you receive compensation for your participation in this study?**

As a participant in this study, you are eligible to win one of four gift certificates (\$25 for an on-line bookstore) when you send a separate e-mail to the researcher at [g.chen@mail.utexas.edu](mailto:g.chen@mail.utexas.edu). This e-mail will not be linked to your responses in any way.

**What if you are injured because of the study?**

There is no foreseen physical risk as a result of participating in this study.

**If you do not want to take part in this study, what other options are available to you?**

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You are free to refuse to be in the study, and your refusal will not influence current or future relationships with The University of Texas at Austin.

**How can you withdraw from this research study and who should I call if I have questions?**

**If you wish to stop your participation in this research study for any reason, you may do so at anytime. You are free to withdraw your consent and stop participation in this research study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits for which you may be entitled. Throughout the study, the researchers will notify you of new information that may become available and that might affect your decision to remain in the study.**

**In addition, if you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Clarke A. Burnham, Ph.D., Chair, The University of Texas at Austin Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, 512/232-4383.**

**How will your privacy and the confidentiality of your research records be protected?**

**Authorized persons from The University of Texas at Austin and the Institutional Review Board have the legal right to review your research records and will protect the confidentiality of those records to the extent permitted by law. If the research project is sponsored then the sponsor also have the legal right to review your research records. Otherwise, your research records will not be released without your consent unless required by law or a court order.**

**If the results of this research are published or presented at scientific meetings, your identity will not be disclosed.**

**Will the researchers benefit from your participation in this study?**

The researcher will benefit from your participation in this study by gaining a better understanding of Asian American individuals regarding how they think about various aspects of their identity from a psychological perspective.

## APPENDIX C

### Demographics Form

1. My sex is: ☐ female ☐ male

2. My age is: \_\_\_\_\_

3. I am:

☐ Asian American

☐ Multi-racial (please specify)

---

4. My ethnic background includes: (check all that apply)

☐ Bangladeshi

☐ Burmese

☐ Cambodian

☐ Chinese

☐ Filipina/o

☐ Hmong

☐ Indian

☐ Indonesian

☐ Japanese

☐ Korean

☐ Laotian

☐ Malaysian

☐ Pacific Islander

☐ Pakistani

☐ Thai

☐ Taiwanese

☐ Vietnamese

☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

5. My income level is (if you are a student, indicate your family's income level):  
(check one)

☐ Under \$10,000

☐ \$10,000-\$19,999

☐ \$20,000-\$29,999

☐ \$30,000-\$39,999

☐ \$40,000-\$54,999

☐ \$55,000-\$74,999

☐ \$75,000 or more

6. My highest level of education completed is: (check one)

☐ Grade school

☐ Some high school

☐ High school diploma/GED

☐ Some college

☐ Bachelor's degree

☐ Some graduate school

☐ Master's degree

☐ Doctoral degree (Ph.D., M.D., J.D.,  
etc.



7. My occupation is: \_\_\_\_\_

8. I have lived in the U.S. for \_\_\_\_ years OR \_\_\_\_ months (if less than one year).

9. I consider myself: (check one)

- ☐ first generation (non-U.S. born; immigrant)  
☐ 1.5 generation (moved to the U.S. before age 10)  
☐ second generation (U.S.-born; parents immigrated to U.S.)  
☐ third generation (U.S.-born; at least one parent was born in U.S.; grandparents immigrated)  
☐ fourth generation or more

10. My sexual orientation is: (check one)

- ☐ bisexual      ☐ heterosexual      ☐ gay or lesbian

11. My current religion is: (check one)

- ☐ no organized group  
☐ organized group – please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

12. Current state you live in: \_\_\_\_\_

13. Currently, I live in a town/city with a population *estimated* to be:

- ☐ less than 10,000 people  
☐ 10,000-49,999 people  
☐ 50,000-99,999 people  
☐ 100,000-499,999 people  
☐ 500,000-1 million people  
☐ over 1 million people

13. This town/city population is *estimated* to be made up of:

\_\_\_\_\_% White Americans  
\_\_\_\_\_% People of Color (i.e., African Americans, Asian Americans, Latinas/os, and Native Americans)

Within this group, what percentage is estimated to be Asian American? \_\_\_\_%

14. [If you currently are a college student, please answer question 14. If you currently are not a college student, please skip question 14.]

My college campus population is *estimated* to be made up of:

\_\_\_\_\_% White Americans  
\_\_\_\_\_% Asian Americans  
\_\_\_\_\_% African Americans  
\_\_\_\_\_% Latinas/os  
\_\_\_\_\_% Native Americans

## APPENDIX D

### Measure of the Management of Multiple Identities

The following questions have to do with how you identify yourself in terms of various social group memberships.

**Before you respond, please note how the following terms are defined:**

When you are asked about **age**, please respond with your current age in mind.

When you are asked about **religion**, please respond with your current religion in mind.

**Ethnicity** refers to national or cultural heritage (e.g., being Vietnamese, Filipino, Indian, etc.).

**Race** is meant to refer to social groups (e.g., Asian American) that are partly based on physical characteristics, like facial features.

**Gender** refers to the social and cultural meanings associated with being born female or male.

**Sexual orientation** refers to being attracted to individuals of the opposite sex, same sex, or both sexes.

**Socioeconomic status** refers to your education, income, occupation, and social class.

The term **identify** is used similarly as “associate with” or “relate to” in the following questions.

#### *Social group Identification – Self view*

1. Individuals often think about themselves in terms of many different aspects of social group identity. For example, Angie is a Mexican-American woman who is of the Catholic faith. For Angie, her view of herself is influenced to varying degrees by her ethnic, gender, and religious identities.

Using the rating scale below, please indicate how strongly **you** identify yourself with different aspects of social group identity. For instance, if you had to describe yourself with these aspects, how important is each of these aspects to how you see yourself?

Please be sure to respond to each item.

How strongly I identify myself with each social group	Not at all				Very strongly
age	1	2	3	4	5
ethnicity	1	2	3	4	5
gender	1	2	3	4	5
race	1	2	3	4	5
religion	1	2	3	4	5
sexual orientation	1	2	3	4	5
socioeconomic status	1	2	3	4	5

2. Looking back on your ratings above, please indicate those 3 aspects of social group identity with which you most strongly identify yourself (if more than 3, please choose only 3 for this question): 1)\_\_\_\_\_ 2)\_\_\_\_\_ 3)\_\_\_\_\_

3. Please explain why you view these 3 as your most significant social group identities:

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4. When you think about your life now, does identifying with more than one aspect of social group identity simultaneously cause conflict within you? Relating to the above example, Angie may feel that her gender identity conflicts with Catholic ideas of gender roles for women.

Yes    No

If you marked “yes” to the above question, please go to the next question. If you marked “no,” please go to question 9.

5. Please list the social group identities that generally create conflict within you:

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6. Using the scale below, please indicate the degree to which they cause conflict on a regular basis:

Not at all		Moderate		To a great extent
1	2	3	4	5

7. If you indicated some degree of conflict in the above question, please provide an example so we can understand better the kinds of conflicts you experience.

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8. How do you manage this conflict?

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*Social group Identification – Societal view*

9. Society often associates people with social group categories. In our example of Angie, she may feel that people see her mostly as a young Mexican-American woman and not as someone with a strong Catholic faith.

Using the rating scale below, please indicate how strongly you perceive **society in general** assigns the group memberships below to you (whether you personally identify with them or not). Please be sure to respond to each item.

How strongly I perceive society in general assigns each social group membership to me	Not at all				Very strongly
age	1	2	3	4	5
ethnicity	1	2	3	4	5
gender	1	2	3	4	5
race	1	2	3	4	5
religion	1	2	3	4	5
sexual orientation	1	2	3	4	5
socioeconomic status	1	2	3	4	5

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10. Looking back on your ratings on your self view and societal view, in your opinion, to what degree does the societal view differ from your self view?

Not at all		Moderate		To a great extent
1	2	3	4	5

If you marked a 3 or higher on the last question, please go to the next question. If not, please go to question 14.

11. Does this difference between the societal view and your self view cause conflict in you?

Yes    No

If you marked “yes” to the above question, please go to the next question. If not, please go to question 14.

12. Which differences (between your view of yourself and societal views) typically cause you conflict?

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13. How do you manage this conflict?

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14. Up to this point, you have indicated your personal identification with various social groups. You have also indicated how you perceive *society* identifies you with social groups.

We are interested in understanding how societal views affect how you identify with social groups. Again, in our example of Angie, she may feel that there are negative stereotypes of Mexican Americans in society so she is very aware of her ethnic identity. Please explain how, in your experience, society's standards and values affect the way you identify with your social groups:

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## APPENDIX E

### Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965)

INSTRUCTIONS: below is a list of statements dealing with your general feelings about yourself. If you strongly agree, choose “1”. If you agree with the statement, choose “2”. If you feel neutral about the statement, choose “3”. If you disagree, choose “4”. If you strongly disagree, choose “5”.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal basis with others.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.	1	2	3	4	5
*3. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I am able to do things as well as most other people.	1	2	3	4	5
*5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I take a positive attitude toward myself.	1	2	3	4	5
7. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.	1	2	3	4	5
*8. I wish I could have more respect for myself.	1	2	3	4	5
*9. I certainly feel useless at times.	1	2	3	4	5
*10. At times I think I am no good at all.	1	2	3	4	5

\* Reverse-scored item.

## APPENDIX F

### Satisfaction With Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985)

Below are five statements with which you may agree or disagree. Using the scale below, indicate your agreement with each item by choosing the appropriate number below that item. Please be open and honest in your responding.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. In most ways my life is close to my ideal.	1	2	3	4	5
2. The conditions of my life are excellent.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I am satisfied with my life.	1	2	3	4	5
4. So far I have gotten the important things I want in life.	1	2	3	4	5
5. If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.	1	2	3	4	5



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