A POSTMODERN CRITIQUE OF PSYCHOLOGY'S REPRESENTATION

OF ASIAN AMERICANS

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ABSTRACT

The way American modernist psychology approaches research on Asian Americans raises problematic issues regarding national race relations and oppression. Under modernist psychology, race is typically treated as a nominal, present-versus-absent category, such as on a census checklist or demographics questionnaire, and the complexity of racial experience and racism is all but ignored. As psychologists, our participation in the construal of race as a stable, essentialized entity serves to collude with societal inequities, allowing many facets of race and racism to remain unconscious and operate unchallenged. This dissertation uses postmodern methodology to highlight the ambiguity of Asian American race within the currently dominant black and white paradigm. In accordance with the scholarship of Laura Uba, Michael Omi, Howard Winant, and Dana Takagi, the author argues that race operates as a verb, in which individuals can be racialized or deracialized depending on their context and location vis-à-vis others in society, explores how racism operates via the construction of a racial "other" that differs depending on the specific racial group in question, exposes how race operates in our society simultaneously as a sociobiological reality and as an illusion, and analyzes the strong link between the racial "other" and American ideology. Specifically, with respect to Asian Americans, their racial "other-ness" comes not in the form of race *per se* but in the form of "Orientalizing" narratives of culture and ethnicity which operate largely unchallenged in the psychology literature. Viewed through deconstructive methods, these dominant psychological narratives point to how America constructs a national ideological identity, preserves ideological (humanistic) values in the face of social inequities, and justifies current power hierarchies between groups. These points

illustrate the complexity of racial dynamics that need to be acknowledged and examined in psychology via postmodern methodologies. The author further investigates how American ideological identity is transmitted and embodied in us, explores the relationship between an internalized ideological identity and psychological health, and comments on how these ideological values operate within clinical practice.

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PREFACE

My foray into the worlds of Psychology, American Ethnic Studies and Asian American contemporary social issues reflects my journey in understanding my developing identity within my ever-changing social world. As a 1.5 generation Asian American female, I was born in Taiwan and immigrated to Texas with my family when I was four-years-old (hence 1.5 generation). We lived in Texas for five years before moving to Washington State, where I lived for 15 years, before moving to New Jersey for graduate school. I recently returned to Washington with my husband and daughter.

Although I have always been aware of my racial and ethnic difference, it was not until college that I became more conscious of the socialized bias and assumptions within our American society. Learning about the social, political and economic spheres that influence our hegemonized cultural value system was invaluable to understanding our perceptions of each others' identity constructs. I became exposed to multidisciplinary literature from amazing scholars such as Michael Omi, Howard Winant, Audre Lorde, Sucheng Chan, and Edward Said. I learned to think critically about social constructs of race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, and age that are encompassed under the heading of "diversity." In fact, this awareness prompted my involvement in social justice, research and social service organizations that specifically served a diverse pan-Asian American community.

It was also during college that I discovered my professional interest in clinical psychology. My undergraduate psychology degree represented my modernist teachings to the effect that the scientific method is bias-free and neutral. Furthermore, I learned that conducting empirical research, which provides powerful evidence in advocating for

social policies, is synonymous with the primary role of a clinical psychologist. The limits of this profession were underscored when my dissatisfaction grew upon encountering more and more "empirically sound" studies on Asian Americans and other "minority" groups that involved summarizing identified characterizations for these groups. In these studies, I found conclusions and results with which I had little personal identification, and I was left with a one-dimensional conceptual picture of these underserved groups. I was surprised by these studies' exclusive focus on ethnicity with little discussion on race, and lack of awareness of any racial bias that enters into our societal conceptualization of ethnicity and culture.

I feel fortunate in graduate school to have had opportunities to integrate my chosen field of psychology with my belief in social justice. In the arena of clinical psychology, I have felt free to explore the contemporary arena of relational psychodynamic teachings and family systems theories that acknowledge the intersubjective sphere in human interactions. Despite the sophistication of theories of personality, psychopathology, and treatment approaches, I have encountered what seems like unintegrated pieces in working with identity constructs, like Asian American race, ethnicity and culture within clinical psychology. As these constructs are socially created and continue to be privileged in describing this specific group, there needs to be special attention paid to how this has evolved in the field of psychology.

It was with these growing questions and concerns, coupled with strong support from various professors and peers that I dove into this broad area for my dissertation, generally titled *A Postmodern Critique of Psychology's Representation of Asian Americans.* I conceptualized my dissertation as an exploratory exercise, utilizing

perspectives in American Ethnic Studies and Psychology in deconstructing race, ethnicity and culture as variables used in psychology to describe populations of Asian descent.

Upon deciding on my topic, I was surprised and inspired to discover *A Postmodern Psychology of Asian Americans: Creating Knowledge of a Racial Minority*, by Laura Uba (2002). This incredibly thin book (only 202 pages) was densely packed with arguments and reflections on the field, offering structure and guidance in my integrative process. This book dealt with greater issues pertaining to the trend towards postmodernism, and the philosophical discussion of the ontological and epistemological assumptions that underlie social sciences including psychology. The author summarizes the limits of modernist psychology, specifically outlining the assumptions in modernist science as an "objective" means to "innate universal truth," and the attitudinal norming of white Americans and defining racial groups as "other" in psychology. She then continues to showcase how postmodern methods can deprivilege dominant narratives, uncover assumptions in dominant narratives on Asian Americans, and she advocates for the use of these methods in the field of psychology. In reading her book, I realized the daunting task at hand: advocating for postmodern methods in a field-American academic psychology-where a modernist philosophy is essentially how it distinguishes itself from other countries' definition of the field of psychology.

The beauty of postmodern thinking is its challenge to what constitutes "facts." By taking away our concept of a universal "fact," it leaves us with individual or group narratives that have the most benefits when viewed in relation to each other. It is via this comparison that we can delve into how "locally ascribed meanings affect behaviors, perceptions, and the constructs; the ways meanings are communicated and negotiated;

and the significance of the genealogy of meanings" (Uba, 2002, p. 138). This treatment of people as individual meaning-makers I find intuitively sound and extremely respectful.

In the array of postmodern theories, deconstruction and hermeneutics have prevailed in the psychology literature with distinct and exciting possibilities, but with their fair share of limitations. The term *postmodernism* operates as an umbrella for a wide range of different theories and ideas that are often contradictory and extremely diffuse. In fact, in reading about deconstruction, I read that if one could linearly explain the process of deconstructing, it would go against its philosophical underpinnings. I have approached this study with the assumption that some modernist order can make particular postmodern methodologies usable without compromising the integrity of what could be gained.

By including postmodern psychology in the mix, there are exciting gains to be made. My goal is not to dismantle American psychology as we know it. The existing dominant modernist paradigms in research (theories, methods) and its subsequent findings and interpretations are essentially "data" that can be constantly deconstructed, adding rich new layers of understanding of the relationship between American psychology and ideology (Hollinger, 1994). This study is an examination of how modernist knowledge is used and how social interests are served in the use of these "facts." As Uba (2002) writes, "Abandoning the metaphysical assumptions of the correspondence theory of truth and the belief that the scientific method has a universal, objective, beatific link to truth does not mean abandoning the quest for useful explanations and descriptions of reality. A postmodern psychology would offer and analyze the premises, coherence, and consequences of different, organizing narratives" (p. 48). Therefore, modernist and postmodern psychology can coexist in a mutually

beneficial way. She advocates an expansion of philosophies and methods to study a wider array of human phenomena than modern psychology can access. The orientation used to examine psychological issues needs to depend on the ontological and epistemological assumptions deemed appropriate for the issue in question.

In learning more of the limits of modern psychology and the benefits of postmodern psychology, I began realizing that it is not an "either-or" situation. The benefits of modern psychology are quite established, and the need for including postmodern psychology for me is undeniable. By the end of the dissertation, I will showcase the benefits of postmodern methods in the arena of contemporary racial issues in psychology. Historically, psychology has stayed outside of the realm of social justice and political justice. This in part is due to psychology's modernist underpinnings of perceived neutrality and objectivity. As contemporary issues of "diversity" are becoming more and more on the radar in our field, we are finding more ways to collectively challenge the status quo. However, in this fight for equal representation, our efforts are still limited by the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of this field. By continuing in this fashion, we are disempowering ourselves as psychologists and legislative players. As Uba (2002) notes, the ability to expand the realm of psychological inquiry and what constitute "facts" in research and practice will have great implications for expanding our traditionally limited political role. Postmodern methodologies can be used too explore social relations and importantly people's relationship to American ideology. In general, ideologies are critical to policy decisions. Our involvement and our expanded methodology are in many ways quite suited towards policy analysis and social change (Uba, 1994).

If my adoration for Uba's (2002) work has not been clear, let me be explicit. It is a brilliant book: comprehensive, insightful and profound. Despite my deep awe of the book, I recognize that it is a work that only a limited audience can fully appreciate. The author's writes with such sophistication in fields of psychology, Asian American Studies, American Ethnic Studies and philosophy in an interwoven, integrated manner that displays a deep understanding of these academic areas, therefore making continuous references to a huge body of interdisciplinary work. Without such academic knowledge bases, it would be difficult for any reader to fully comprehend and utilize such work.

My dissertation, far from new in concept and written in a limited scope from the perspective as a student in American Ethnic Studies and psychology, is my opportunity to participate in this important and necessary discussion. I hope to contribute my own narrative and understanding of American psychology's need to expand from its underpinnings, focusing specifically on issues of race and on Asian Americans.

All too often race in psychology is treated as a nominal mutually exclusive category. There is an assumption that race is simply a category one can check off, such as on a census checklist or demographics questionnaire. As psychologists, our perception of race as a stable entity serves to collude with societal inequities, because we are blinded to the many ways in which race operates on an unconscious level. Complex racial dynamics do not assume that race operates as an essentialized stable concept. Complex racial dynamics refer to the many ways in which race operates in unstable and dynamic ways. Many of these ways, of course, can never be fully listed or defined. I pinpoint several "dynamics" largely using Omi and Winant's (1994) Racial Formation work, selected aspects of Uba's (2002) deconstructive analysis on privileged characterizations (ethnicity,

and culture, assimilation/acculturation) regarding Asian Americans, and Tagaki's (1993) discussion on Asian American's ambiguous racial identity.

For instance, under racial dynamics, race is also thought of as a verb, in which individuals can be racialized or deracialized depending on their location to others in society and a given context. Under racial dynamics, racism operates in the form of a racial "other" that differs depending on the racial group. Also under racial dynamics, "race" operates in society simultaneously as 1) a sociobiological reality and 2) an illusion. These two specific forms of race in current operation are based on past transformations of race in American history.

To uncover these aspects of racial dynamics, Chapter One examines the manner in which modern race has been constructed in America (Omi & Winant, 1994). By understanding the constructed history of race, we see the context in which race has been transformed. The scientific biological legitimacy of race prior to the 1920s further reinforced our socialized ability to view people in generalized racial categories. The challenge to this biological reality of race ensued post-1920s. Although this challenge meant positive strides for social equality, race and racial dynamics became hidden under different guises such as ethnicity or culture. This is an important point about racial dynamics: race and racism are still in operation in our society even when the social issue on the table is not about race *per se*. In addition, how racial dynamics operate in society is largely dependent on the specific racial group in question. The different ways in which racial dynamics operate for different groups need further examination to understand the "tricky" nature of racism. Accordingly, Chapter Two focuses on locating Asian American race and compares the manner in which race operates for this group with respect to black

Americans and white Americans. Chapter Three demonstrates how psychology falls into the same trap of treating race as an essentialized stable concept. In this chapter, I discuss selected aspects of Uba's (2002) deconstructed analysis of culture, ethnicity and assimilation/acculturation in the Asian American psychology literature and uncover dominant narratives about the Asian American racial "other" and its function in upholding American ideology. Finally, in the last chapter, I apply these points about racial dynamics to clinical practice. From learning these aspects of racial dynamics, we can finally consider how racial dynamics play out in the psychology literature, clinical practice and society at large.

CHAPTER I

THE CONSTRUCTION OF AMERICAN RACE

Introduction

> To study race in the United States is to enter a world of paradox, irony, and danger. In this world, arbitrarily chosen human attributes shape politics and policy, love and hate, life and death. All the powers of the intellect—artistic, religious, scientific, political—are pressed into service to explain racial distinctions and to suggest how they may be maintained, changed, or abolished. The intellectual climate is anything but benign where racial studies are concerned. The ordinary competitiveness and isolation of academic work only adds to the peril. (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. *xi*)

In order to frame the discussion of racial dynamics covered within this dissertation, it is important to understand the manner in which the modern concept of race has been constructed. This chapter analyzes the historical construction of race in America and the contexts by which race has been transformed over the years. This history illuminates the context in which race has become hidden under different guises such as ethnicity or culture. Omi and Winant's (1994) racial formation work provides much of that contextual framework.

Throughout United States history, there are few concepts as intensely politically, economically and socially charged as race. In the past, theories on race—its meaning, its development and transformation through time ,and its differing contexts—have not

adequately captured the complexity, nor acknowledged the deeply embedded nature of race in the creation and maintenance of our society. Even today, definitions of race, ethnicity, and culture are not mutually exclusive in that it is difficult to define one concept without reference to or differentiation from the other. As Uba (2002) states, the difficulty in defining each concept is due to the instability of the terms and their multiple intertextual meanings. Uba (2002) argues that "much of the instability of race's meaning is due to its wide-ranging intertextuality, such as its perceived relation to wealth, power, criminal behavior, and nationality, and the unstable significance of racial-minority status. For example, people are embedded in multiple layers of potential minority statuses (e.g., in school or workplace) or majority status (e.g., within the family)" (p. 75).

Omi and Winant (1994) advocate for recognizing the fundamental role that race plays in structuring and organizing our social world and propose the concept of "Racial Formation" as a tool for understanding race in our contemporary society. According to Omi and Winant (1994), "race is a concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies" (p. 55). From a Racial Formation perspective, race is both a social structure and a cultural representation. Racial Formation is "the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed...Racial Formation is the process of historically situated projects in which human bodies and social structures are represented and organized...[Race is linked] to the evolution of hegemony, the way in which society is organized and ruled" (Omi & Winant, 1992, pp.55-56).

What is Modern Race?

> There is a continuous temptation to think of race as an *essence*, as something fixed, concrete, and objective. And there is also an opposite temptation: to imagine race as a mere *illusion*, a purely ideological construct which some ideal non-racist social order would eliminate. It is necessary to challenge both these positions, to disrupt and reframe the rigid and bipolar manner in which they are posed and debated, and to transcend the presumably irreconcilable relationship between them. (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 54)

Historically, the development of the concept of race was born out of categorizing people on the most superficial of differences, arbitrary physical attributes (assumptions made connecting white perception of another's culture—e.g., primitive or exotic to perception of physiognomy). The very creation of these categories has always been linked with political, economic and social agendas of conquering nations. Thus, the concept and meaning of race has always been linked with racism. Omi and Winant (1994) argue that in United States history during the modernist era, the temptation to reify race as a biological essence in human beings has been great, as it has provided the justification for a current unequal social order. Just prior to the postmodern era, the concept of race has gone to the other extreme, and the specificity of defining race in relation to our society has been lost. It is only with a critical eye that the definition of race can be examined with respect to its global and contextual nature.

The History of Race

> For most of its existence both as [a] European colony and as an independent nation, the U.S. was a racial dictatorship. From 1607 to 1865, —258 years—most

non-whites were firmly eliminated from the sphere of politics. After the Civil War, there was a brief egalitarian experiment of Reconstruction which terminated ignominiously in 1877. In its wake followed almost a century of legally sanctioned segregation and denial of the vote, nearly absolute in the South and much of the Southwest, least effective in the North and far West, but formidable in any case. These barriers fell only in the mid 1960s, a mere quarter century ago. Nor did the successes of the black movement and its allies mean that all obstacles to their political participation had know been abolished. Patterns of racial inequality have proven, unfortunately to be stubborn and persistent. (Omi & Winant, 1994, pp. 65-66)

In order to understand the current complexity of racial dynamics in the United States, we must first understand the racial history of America and its legacy.

Colonialism during the Enlightenment and Romantic Era

The categorization of people based on physical characteristics can be found in the earliest of documents, such as the Bible. It was not until the rise of Europe and the arrival of Europeans in the Americas that the modern concept of race began to develop (Omi & Winant, 1994). The dialogue on physical differences in people began with strong links to economic, political and social gains, when these European merchants "discovered" the "new" land in all its wealth and abundance and came across people of considerable physical distinctiveness. The "discovery" of these people challenged their very conception of human beings and their pre-existing Christian conceptions of human origins. In order to justify their actions, they imposed a psychological separation between themselves and those less than human "uncivilized heathens" (Omi & Winant, 1994).

In practice, of course, the seizure of territories and goods, the introduction of slavery through the encomienda and other forms of coerced native labor, and then through the organization of the African slave trade—not to mention the practice of outright extermination—all presupposed a worldview which distinguished Europeans, as children of God, full-fledged human beings, etc. from the "Others." (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 62)

Even during the Enlightenment period, there was already a general awareness of race. Great philosophers of this period, including Locke, Hume, Kant, and Hegel, had blatantly strong opinions on the racial inferiority of non-whites (Omi & Winant, 1994). After the Romantic period, the religious justifications that rationalized colonialism eventually gave away to scientific justifications. During this period, the salient issues became about nation building, the natural rights of man, the right of revolution, and concerns about the establishment of natural economies in a world trading system. These were issues difficult to make peace with in the ongoing exploitation, enslavement and expulsion of native peoples (Omi & Winant, 1994).

Late 18th Century-19th Century: Modernist America

In America, with the legacy of slavery, whites comprise the top of the power hierarchy and blacks the bottom. White (skin) was a racial term created by those who defined themselves in that group, whereas black (and later brown, yellow and red) was a racial term given by whites to characterize others. The social order of being perceived as having either white-skin or black-skin became the dominant and most salient aspect of identity in society.

By the 7th federal census in 1850, the exaggerated skin colors, white and black, were used to describe two racial groups. The census asked for color and gave the choices: white, black, and mulatto. Mulatto, a word derived from old Spanish meaning mule, was used to describe a racially mixed person with both European and African ancestry. The term mulatto reveals the underlying disparagement of inter-racial unions.

By the 10th American federal census in 1880, census takers asked for color and gave the choices: white, black, mulatto, Chinese, Indian. At that point, there was not an adequate racial framework to categorize people by obvious skin color differences, nor could the miscellaneous category of mulatto be applied to new immigrants. Thus, as immigrant populations from different countries of origin became more salient in mainstream society, a person's ethnicity (in this case, the country of origin) was used to categorize them.

Within American modernist society, logical positivism dominated. Logical positivism asserts that there is an "external world independent of human experience and that objective, 'scientific' knowledge about this world can be obtained through direct sense experience, as interpreted within the framework of the theory-embedded, hypothesis-testing laboratory setting" (Fishman & Franks, 1992, p. 177).

Four scientific assumptions came to underlie many of America's social sciences including: (1) knowledge reflects the unadulterated imprint of reality; (2) the reality studied by scientists is stable and ordered by laws; (3) parsimonious explanations are best; and (4) the scientific method provides an accurate and objective foundation for knowledge (Uba, 2002, p.4). These assumptions have been repeatedly challenged and examined for their Euro-centric bias (e.g., Polkinghome, 1990; Uba, 2002).

In particular, American psychology developed from the belief that by using scientific research methods, objective truths would be revealed about human behaviors and their meanings. While considered more of a philosophy in Europe, American psychology, in pre- and post-World War I, had an identity that was increasingly defined by empiricism.

By the 1900s in America, the movement towards justifying the current political, economic and social strata, or the "natural" racial hierarchy, moved into the scientific arena. During this period, the presiding belief was that race had a biological basis. Social Darwinism, Spencerist, and eugenicist thinking about race and race relations were at their height. By providing evidence of biological distinctions in racial categories, via racial distinctions such as Caucasoid, Mongoloid, and Negroid, scientific arguments were marshaled in the service of proving the inferiority of non-Caucasoid races. Such arguments assumed that the truth of race is in innate characteristics, the essence of human beings, of which skin color and other physical attributes provide the most obvious indicators. Having postulated differences of innate essence, many scholars argued that differences in intelligence, temperament, and sexuality, among other individual characteristics, are explainable by race (Omi & Winant, 1994).

20th Century America

By the 20th century, challenges to the notion of objective truth opened up the philosophical framework of social constructionism. Social construction theory posits that reality is relative to the individual or group, because it is conceptually constructed. Facts

and data can only be understood within the context of a particular cultural, social, and linguistic context (Fishman & Franks, 1992).

Within this philosophical shift, the biological perspective on race was coming under increasing attack. The social constructionists increasingly challenged the view that there is an innate biological basis for race and argued that the concept of race is socially constructed. It became widely recognized that the biological concept of subspecies can not be applied to human beings, and that there is more genetic variability within racial groups than between them (Brown & Armelagos 2001; Lewontin 1972). Instead of dialogues on the justification of race, which became increasingly controversial, theories of ethnicity and cultural differences became umbrella concepts that subsumed race. Despite the well-intentioned attempt to deconstruct race and loosen society's rigid racial hierarchy, racial perceptions and bias went largely unchallenged, as theories of ethnicity and cultural differences became increasingly popular as ways to explain away social hierarchies and assume social progress.

Understanding race through the ethnicity theory.

The Chicago School of Sociology, founded by Robert E. Park in the 1920s, came up with ethnicity-based theories, which reworked the social scientific approach to race and incorporated the concept of race as a part of ethnicity. Omi and Winant (1994) describe how this "Ethnicity theory" set out to challenge the then-mainstream, biology-heavy view of race in the 1920s and how it maintained its dominance until the 1960s,

when the limitations of this theory were challenged. It resurged in dominance in the late 1970s and 1980s.

Ethnicity theory posits that race is a social category and is only one of the many determinants of ethnic group identity. Ethnicity is "defined as the result of group formation process based on culture and descent. Culture incorporates factors of religion, language, customs, nationality, political identification among other factors. Descent is defined by heredity and a sense of group origins" (Omi & Winant, 1992, p.15).

In effect, the concept of race, which was fraught with political, economic and social complexity, was subsumed under the less politically charged concept of ethnicity. Key figures from this school of thought were Robert E. Park and Horace Kallen, who introduced the concepts of assimilation and cultural pluralism (Omi & Winant, 1994). In response to the increasing numbers of immigrants to America in the first half of the 20th century, early ethnicity-based theory concentrated on problems of migration and intergroup contact:

> Early ethnicity-based theory, considered in the U.S. context, concentrated on problems of migration and "cultural contact" (to use Park's phrase). The problems and foci generated by this approach have continued to preoccupy the school: incorporation and separation of "ethnic minorities," the nature of ethnic identity, and the impact of ethnicity on politics. (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 15)

Park's race relation cycle specified four stages of intergroup contact: (1) contact, (2) conflict, (3) accommodation, and (4) assimilation. This cycle postulated a law of historical development by which it was possible to assess a group's progress in adjusting to America, along a fixed continuum. Park's race relation cycle was viewed as one of the

most important contributions to the field and was the beginning of America's melting pot analogy, whereby all people of differing ethnicities, races and histories are seen as coming together into a melting pot under the idealistic heading of equality for all (Omi & Winant, 1994).

Along with this school of thought came central underlying assumptions that came to characterize scholarship on race relations (Omi & Winant, 1994). The first assumption, congruent with social constructionist beliefs, is that ethnicity and race are not central or persistent elements of modern societies. Another assumption is that racism, which is not an independent entity, is the outcome of mostly economic or psychological causal determinants. Therefore, racism exists in the attitudes and prejudices of Americans. Another assumption that has potent implications and is central to critique of ethnicity theory is the *immigrant analogy*: the assumption that different immigrant groups, whether a white European ethnic group or other racial and ethnic minority group, are equally comparable and operated on a fixed continuum (Omi & Winant, 1994).

In the assimilation model that would be reworked and elaborated in the following decades, ethnic enclaves were seen as one stage in the intergroup contact cycle that would eventually and ideally lead to assimilation within the dominant unitary Anglo-Saxon culture (Omi & Winant, 1994).

It is important to note that there is an irrefutable link between assimilation and acculturation, although the specifics of that link have been widely debated. Acculturation has been defined as a process by which an individual's behaviors and a group's cultural knowledge, identity, and behavior styles change in the direction of the dominant group (LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993). Acculturation has been regarded as a form of

assimilation (Gordon, 1964), and assimilation has been thought of as an aspect of

acculturation (Berry, 1988). Other theorists equate assimilation and acculturation

(Nguyen, Messe, & Stollak, 1999).

Limits to the Ethnicity Theory.

By the 1960s and 70s the ethnicity theory was coming under increasing

challenges. During the Civil Rights movement, race and racism took center stage in

American politics. This period hosted an intense discourse in which the very meaning of

race was politically contested.

In the 1970s, ethnic minority movements increasingly challenged the ethnicity

theory (Omi & Winant, 1994). The European immigrant analogy did not bode well for

other racial groups, because structural barriers in the environment did not allow for the

assimilation of non-white racial groups. In particular, the purported value of assimilation

was challenged. Critics argued that assimilation, or also called "Anglo-conformity," is

not and should not necessarily be the desired norm of differing groups. Because the

ethnicity theory reduced race to one determinant of ethnicity, the theory ignores the

institutional and ideological nature of race, as well as the systemic social presence of race

dynamics in America (Omi & Winant, 1994). During this time, many blacks and later

Latinos, Indians, and Asian Americans, rejected ethnic identity to take on the more

radical racial identity.

In the immigrant analogy, since all groups are evaluated on a fixed continuum on

which they have equal footing, there is the assumption that group norms are central to

how well a group is doing. Essentially, this view allows for unfair racial or ethnic group comparisons that do not take into account each group's social, political, and economic history and current context. If one group did not do well in a given situation it tended to be attributed not to the environment, but to the group's values. This conclusion reflects a naïve comparison of racial and ethnic groups; after all, if group X and Y did well in inferior settings, than why can't group Z do as well (Omi & Winant, 1994)? This theory ignores the unique racial dynamics and racial history of different groups in America.

In acculturation/assimilation theories, there is an innate modernist assumption that the process is on a developmental continuum, and that level of acculturation/assimilation correlates positively with adaptation (Uba, 2002). Such assumptions are problematic and biased. The view that development operates in a linear progression and in stages indicates its modernist roots. Acculturation is thought to be quantifiable, and can even be showcased in acculturation scales. Modernist thinking assumes that development can be tracked by looking at a group's behavior (compared to a mainstream norm) at face value. There is no understanding of the behaviors beyond their face value, no questioning the intentions behind behaviors, no sensitivity to how the same behavior differs in meaning across situations or any accounting for how habit plays a role in the behavior (Uba, 2002).

An alternative to viewing acculturation as a part of development is seeing how differences in acculturation are personal creations of one's culture. For instance, acculturation narratives can be viewed as follows:

Rather, the combining and balancing of values, behavioral styles, and ways of interpreting within different personal and social contexts could be viewed as a

dynamic integrated process: Individuals uniquely create their acculturative status based on their synthesis of different texts and interpretations of experiences arising from , for example, the region of the United States or neighborhood in which they reside, their socioeconomic status, point in history, racial experiences, gender, intelligence or gang affiliation. In those terms, acculturation is a not as stable as modernist outlooks assume. (Uba, 2002, p. 101)

Chapter Conclusion: What is the Bottom Line?

Despite a contemporary consensus that race is not a biologically real concept, the legacy of 1900s America's scientific legitimacy of race, along with our subsequent socialized ability to differentiate racial groups, currently has widespread standing in society. We have all been socialized in the skill of differentiating an individual's physiognomy and behaviors, frequently ascertaining each other's perceived racial differences based on a co-constructed template of what it means to be of a particular racial background. Our assumptions of each other's racial differences are rooted in the argument professing different racial essences to which accounts for a wide range of human characteristics (e.g., intelligence, athletic ability, musical ability, morality, abusive behaviors, egalitarian beliefs…) such as characterized in stereotypes. Thus, a biologically essentialized form of race and racism continues to characterize American culture.

In American history, we also see how the biologistic views of race have been increasingly challenged. Race soon lost its specificity and became viewed in the opposite extreme as one component of ethnicity and culture. However, this denial of race functioned as a way to deny the consequences of racism. After all, the thinking goes, "if there is no race, there can be no racism." This led to another conceptual form of race, the essentialized ethnic/cultural race in which race operates as an illusion.

CHAPTER II

LOCATING ASIAN AMERICAN RACE

Introduction

Where do Asian Americans fit within this larger framework that has evolved

historically? Racial dynamics operate differently for each racial group; this is the "tricky"

nature of racism. This chapter examines the American racial framework based on a black

and white polarized paradigm. If the paradigm is based on polarizing blacks and whites,

where do Asian Americans fit in this picture?

What is Asian American Race?

In order to understand the fluidity of Asian American race, one must examine the

meanings of the term "Asian American."

Asian American: An Ethnic or Racial Term?

According to the 2000 US Census, people of Asian descent residing in America

account for 4.2 % (10.2 million) and people of Pacific Islander descent account for .3%

(874,000) of the United States population. The term "Asian" refers to people having origins in the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent. Within this term, there are Chinese, Filipino, Korean, Japanese, Asian Indian, Pakistani, Vietnamese, and Hmong ethnicities, among others. The diversity of people under this umbrella sociopolitical racial label of Asian American is striking.

Contributing to this broad category, government agencies adopted the term "Asian Pacific Islander" (API) and "Asian Pacific Islander American" (APIA) because they found it convenient to lump together the various Asian groups and people from the Pacific Islands (Chan, 1991). The term "Pacific Islander" refers to people related to the original people of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands. This label is inclusive of people with Polynesian, Micronesian, and Melanesian cultural backgrounds.

The term "Asian American" operates as both a racial and an all-encompassing ethnic term. Ethnicity is defined as the "result of group formation process based on culture and descent. Culture incorporates factors of religion, language, customs, nationality, and political identification among other factors. Descent is defined by heredity and a sense of group origins" (Omi & Winant, 1994, p.15). As ethnic terms, "Asian Americans" and "Asian Pacific Islander American" gloss over heterogeneity: they subsume diverse groups with varying characteristics, such as predominant language preferences, cultural beliefs, and socioeconomic statuses, and individuals uniquely combining personality characteristics, intelligence, attitudes, experiences, and personal values. The ethnic term defines Asian Americans in a homogenized, essentialized, and undifferentiated way (Tanaka, Ebrero, Linn, & Morera, 1998).

However, as racial terms, "Asian American" and "Asian Pacific Islander American," acknowledge the racial treatment of this large and diverse group. Because of our socialized racial lenses, people in America tend to be treated based on racial perception rather than ethnic ones. The creation of racial bias in America towards people of Asian descent arose in connection with the first several Asian ethnic groups to settle in America. When most people think of Asian Americans, they tend to think automatically of people of East Asian descent: Chinese, Japanese, and Korean. These ethnic groups were the first immigrant communities to settle in the United States, and their circumstances, along with the political and economic climate, led to the development of ethnic stereotypes that generalized to all people perceived as Asian. If the label "Asian American" continues to operate as an umbrella ethnic term, as opposed to a racial term, policies will continue to unfairly overrepresent East Asian American groups, a process that can lead to systematic underrepresentation of other Asian American groups (Uba, 2002).

The term "Asian American" became vital to activists in the 1960s, who claimed the term to identify themselves as a group in America that has had a specific racial treatment (Chan, 1991). The term acknowledges commonalities in the racist experience of those perceived as Asian. Thus, the use of the label "Asian American" positively acknowledges this group's perceived race, racial treatment, and racist experiences. The term "Asian American," like "black American" or "white American," is appropriately a racial term.

How Do We Locate the Unstable Nature of Asian American Race?

One way to locate the unstable nature of Asian American race is to compare and contrast the way in which race operates differently for specific racial groups.

How Does Race Operate Differently Between Racial Groups?

American racial groups are not treated equivalently in terms of nomenclature. Different racial terms are used or emphasized dependent on the specific group. For example, according to the US Census (2000), we use the colors white and black to describe racial groups, but not yellow, brown and red. In using racial terms referencing continents, we use Asian American, African American, European American, but not Australian American, North American, South American or Antarctican American. Let us also consider our use of racial categories such as Latino/a Americans, Hispanic Americans, Chicano Americans or Native Americans, among others.

Even the 2000 US Census short form, for example, asked two race/ancestry questions:

1. Is the person Spanish/Hispanic/Latino?

- No, not Spanish/Hispanic/Latino
- Yes, Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano
- Yes, Puerto Rican
- Yes, Cuban
- Yes, other Spanish /Hispanic/Latino   (write in group)

2. What is the person's race?

- White
- Black, African American,
- American Indian or Alaska Native (write in tribe)
- Asian Indian
- Chinese
- Filipino
- Japanese
- Korean
- Vietnamese
- Native Hawaiian
- Guamanian or Chamorro
- Samoan
- Other Pacific Islander (write in race)
- Other race (write in race)

The 2000 US Census acknowledges that "race categories" contain both racial and national-origin groups. Even in contemporary times, differentiation between racial and ethnic labels for different American groups remains inconsistent. The selective use of a racial skin color versus racial ethnic label is indicative of the manner in which different perceived groups have been conceptualized and historically treated. American race was constructed based on a black American and white American paradigm. Other racial groups are located in the midst of this paradigm.

One way in which race operates differently for various racial groups concerns the way race is privileged differently in the descriptors for each group. In American popular narratives, for example, race is highly privileged in describing black Americans and least privileged in identifying white Americans. For Asian Americans and Latino Americans, we see how race is a less privileged descriptor than it is for black Americans, yet more privileged than for white Americans (Uba, 2002).

In effect, race in America operates from a black and white dichotomy. Asian

Americans, who are neither black nor white, do not have racial standing, if you will, on

their own. Their racial identity is viewed in the context of polarities of white and black,

and individual Asian Americans are typically perceived as more similar either to one or

the other.

> Both popular and academic understandings of "race" are shaped and defined by the categories "black" and "white." In this conventional frame of black/white relations, Asian Americans are perceived to be either like whites or not like whites, or alternatively, like blacks or not like blacks. The fact that Asian Americans are neither "black" nor "white" has meant that Asian Americans have functioned as a "wild card" in racial politics—their experiences are frequently ignored or appropriated by others (i.e., non-Asians) in discourses about race. (Takagi, 1993, ¶ 1)

In the arena of American racial politics from 1983 to 1990, Asian Americans have

been the racial "wildcard" in controversies about access to higher education. From the

1983 to 1986, Asian American enrollment became a racially charged issue at leading

institutions of higher education, including Berkeley, Brown, Harvard, Princeton,

Stanford, and UCLA. Controversial findings included decreasing rates of Asian

American enrollment despite large increases in Asian American applicants. This led to

suspicions that an intentional admissions ceiling was being imposed by university

officials (Takagi, 1993).

> In the first period of the controversy, Asian American activists effectively racialized claims of discrimination by arguing that Asian American students were unfairly turned away from universities because they were Asian. In the second part of the debate, many university officials sought to deracialize the controversy by arguing that Asian Americans were "good but not exceptional" students.

Conservatives effectively played both sides of the racialization "equation." On one had, they used the Asian admissions issue to appeal to public disdain for racial discrimination by calling attention to the plight of Asian American students. On the other hand, they retreated from the issue of race by insisting that the solution to racial discrimination was to institute deracialized admissions policies, that is, to end affirmative action. In short, conservatives deployed Asian admissions as a racial problem as a means to a deracialized end, the abolition of affirmative action. (Takagi, 1993, ¶ 42)

This issue showcases how the Asian American category is:

ambiguously related to the category of "racial minority." Although Asian Americans might be thought of as part of "diversity", they are rarely if ever given racial preference in university admissions…In other words Asian Americans are a racial group that is variably defined and counted as a minority.
(Takagi, 1993, ¶ 44)

Another point Takagi makes is that "the controversy over Asian admissions is a particularly striking example of how Asian Americans become marginalized from discussions about racial politics" (¶ 45). In this case, neoconservatives "spoke out" on behalf of Asian American injustices, yet utilized their plight as an added rationale in their agenda to end affirmative action practices. Thus, the ambiguous nature of Asian American race opens it up for exploitation and misuse by other groups.

Uba (2002) further characterizes the instability of race for Asian Americans in the following example:

For example, Asian Americans are regarded by many white Americans as the near-equivalent of white when the issue is who might be a desirable neighbor but as law-breaking minorities by racially profiling police officers. Groups that are neither black nor white are part of racial politics, but simultaneously peripheral to it: They are racialized—characterized in terms of race—and deracialized—

perceived as people for whom race is irrelevant (Takagi, 1993) or in the case of the biracial, ambiguous. (Uba, 2002, p. 77)

It is important to keep in mind that race as a modern concept was constructed based on a black and white polarity. The result of viewing representations of situations, people, issues or concepts in terms of polarities is unnecessarily limited choices and caricatures that conceptually distort and obscure complexity (Morawski, 1990). American society operates from a central *deracialized* perspective, with a white American racial perspective as the norm. The binary opposite of this central deracialized norm is the highly *racialized* black American "Other." Asian Americans, fitting neither racial groupings, thus have a contradictory and widely fluctuating perceived race. This ambiguity and instability of the concept and meaning of race for Asian Americans lead to the paradox of their racial experience being part of the racial politics in America in a marginalized way.

In general, race is unstable based on the different degree to which race is privileged for different groups, but it is also highlighted in how individuals are differently racialized and deracialized, depending on their location in the American racial paradigm.

In the case of Asian Americans, given their ever-fluctuating racial identity, we can assume that there are parts of them that access a deracialized norm (fitting a "normal" racial framework) in the greater society, and other parts that do not. Similar to black Americans, it is not simply a matter of "wanting" or "not wanting" to fit into a white or deracialized dominant world, as there are external barriers that bar a racialized "other" from assimilating. For some, participation within a deracialized norm is as easy as buying band-aids in the drug store which are "neutral" or "skin-colored," or moving into an

affluent part of town without hostility or economic consequences. This taken-for-granted

participation, however, is less available for those with language barriers (e.g., limited

English skills, stronger accents) and a limited understanding of deracialized mainstream

culture, and it can also be undermined by other circumstances (e.g., low socioeconomic

status, poverty, limited job opportunities due to racism…).

Orientalism: Asian American Racial "Other"

In postmodern discourse, an important concept is the dichotomous operation of

"I" versus "other." In effect, self-identity or "I" is facilitated through the construction of a

dichotomous "other" (Sampson, 1993). The problematic nature of centers is that "I" is

central and privileged and "other" is ignored, marginalized, and repressed. Therefore, self

operating as central and privileged, is constructed in relation to an inauthentic creation, a

distorted, split-off representation of the self.

For Asian Americans, their racial "other" does not operate in the same manner as

other racial groups. Consider how race is less privileged for Asian Americans than for

black Americans and more privileged than for white Americans. What type of racial

"other" is activated for this group? Remember our previous analysis of the construction

of race and the manner in which race became largely subsumed under ethnicity in the

ethnicity theory. For Asian Americans, their essentialized racial portrayal comes in the

form of "Orientalizing" ethnic and cultural narratives. This contemporary phenomenon

has deep roots. Western perspectives of the East have a long history of "Orientalism," a

concept Edward Said (1978) coined to characterize British and French attitudes toward

people of the East. Said notes, "The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences" (p.1). This fantasy of the "Orient" as a romantic, exotic place populated by feminine and passive people who valued hierarchical, traditional authorities was used to dichotomously define what the creators, the Occident (West), was and was not (e.g., democratic and individualistic). As Said (1978) notes, "The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. In addition, the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality and experience" (Said, 1978, p.1-2)

The legacy of this European invention was passed down to America in the stereotypes that can be found throughout American History, but were particularly highlighted during times of the Chinese Exclusion Laws, prior to World War II, and in the creation of the "Yellow Peril."

When most Americans think of Asians, they tend to think automatically of people of East Asian descent: Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans. As described earlier, these ethnic groups were the first large immigrant communities to settle in the United States and their circumstances along with the political and economic climate of the time led to the development of stereotypes that have led to America's Orientalized version of Asians. Asian stereotypes tend to revolve around polarities, for instance, Asian males are perceived as either passive and effeminant or the polar opposite, patriarchal tyrants (e.g., Fu Manchu or gangbangers). Asian females are stereotypically perceived as passive,

subservient geishas or on the other end of the spectrum, seductive and treacherous dragon ladies. In addition, Asian groups were stereotyped as the yellow peril, an endless enemy population, or the polar extreme, of the model minority (C. So, personal communication, January 24, 2000). These "in-your-face" Orientalizing racial narratives became politically incorrect in the 1960s.

> Before that Hart-Cellar Immigration Act and particularly before World War II, media portrayals of Asian Americans were usually either racialized or prototypically Orientalizing. However, the initial post-1965 influx of foreign-born Asians occurred when civil rights issues were temporarily at the forefront of the general U.S. consciousness, spurring deracialized narratives about Asian Americans. A difference in acculturation may thus have become a more socially acceptable basis for social distance than race. (Uba, 2002, p. 99)

This time period prompted "culturally sensitive" dialogues about the social context which attacked blatant racism, however did not address the full effects of racism in the hearts and minds of Americans. Herein, we see at the heart of Asian American racial "other," is not based on skin color or physiogamy, but attributed to ethnic and cultural distortions. Therefore, at the heart of racism against Asian Americans is often an unconscious perception of an Orientalized racial "other."

What Ways Do the Essentialization and Illusionary Nature of Race Occur for Asian, Black and White Americans?

In order to locate Asian American race, we see how race functions differently for different racial groups. Considering our understanding of the construction of race in

America, we see how race tends to operate in both essentialized and illusionary form. For black Americans, race is highly privileged in an essentialized form. For white Americans, race is an illusion and is treated as virtually non-existent. This white deracialized center operates as the norm in our society. For Asian Americans, their racial identity is viewed in more ambiguous form. The concept of the racial "other" is not similar to how black Americans racial "other" operates. For Asian Americans, their race operates as an illusion under an essentialized Orientalized racial "other."

Chapter Conclusion: What is the Bottom Line?

Race, an unstable and multiple meaning term, was created from a dichotomous white versus black framework in America. Asian American race, like other racial groups (e.g., Latino Americans…) is located within this dichotomy and pulled towards either end. This racial ambiguity allows for exploitation within the greater power system. Asian American race is often times denied and operates with a racial illusionary form. This has the effect of diminishing this group's voice in racial dialogues on social inequities. In the previous chapter, we see how race became subsumed under the ethnicity theory. Ethnicity and culture are two constructs that are highly privileged, and are vulnerable to distortion, for Asian Americans. In effect, Asian American racial "other" is unacknowledged and hidden under essentializing Orientalized narratives.

CHAPTER III

PSYCHOLOGY'S REPRESENTATION OF ASIAN AMERICANS:

ORIENTALIZED NARRATIVES DECONSTRUCTED

Introduction

As explained in Chapter II, Asian American racial "other" operates as an illusion under an essentialized Orientalized form which acts to diminish this group's voice in racial dialogues. How is this represented in the field of modern psychology, and what are the associated consequences for how modern psychology studies the issue? What would it look like to expand current methodologies of modern psychology? What would this tell us about race relations (specifically Asian Americans and white Americans) in America?

This chapter focuses on evaluating the psychological narratives of this Orientalized racial "other" which is currently facilitated by modernist methodologies. In addition, it explores how deconstructive analysis provides insights into race relations that may challenge social inequities rather than colluding with them.

How Does Modernist Psychology Treat Race?

Complex racial dynamics typically operate unexamined in modernist psychology. Considering what we know so far about the instability of race, a variety of questions ensue, for example: When does paying attention to race, culture and ethnicity become essentializing versus fluid and authentic? When is race ignored and for what specific unconscious or conscious intention? Which social contexts activate specific occurrences? What triggers an individual to see a racial "other?" What triggers an individual to see a person as more racialized or deracialized? How do these perceptions occur for differently perceived racial groups?

What contributes to the scarcity of complex racial research is the tendency of modernist psychologists to focus in on one racial group (possibly with a white American control group) and ask only quantitative questions, ignoring phenomenological narratives (Uba, 2002). The existing research paradigm systematically ignores both complex understandings of individuals and groups and intentions behind behaviors, resulting in biased depictions of racial groups.

> Modernist psychological parochialism favors particular types of concepts, leaving others as detritus. Modernist psychologists are more likely to ask quantitative questions such as, "How communicative are Asian Americans compared to non-Asian Americans" than questions about verbal devices and styles or when Asian Americans' thinking may differ from what they communicate. Regarding people as just embodiments of lawful, transcendent relationships among variables typically overrides phenomenological narratives too. Facing the Rocky Mountains is a different experience, and can lead to different behaviors and attitudes, depending on whether you are admiring their beauty, hoping your automobile can climb interstate 70, or tumbling down a ski slope. Analysis of quantitative

variables, such as height of the mountains, or categorical variables, such as season, only provides certain types of knowledge, which might not even be meaningful when trying to understand why a person decides to live near those mountains. (Uba, 2002, p. 60)

Researchers in psychology fall into the trap of treating race, ethnicity and culture as nominal, mutually exclusive stable concepts. Typically, race is essentialized in its use as a categorical variable and/or ignored in all its complexity (Uba, 2002). Even when highly racialized groups are the focus, race sometimes is still treated as an illusion. Dependent on the racial group in question, race is ignored through the use of specific, politically correct code words, such as "multicultural," "diverse," and "high-risk," among others (Uba, 2002). This nomenclature serves various purposes, including avoiding dialogue about racism (Williams, 2001).

For Asian Americans, issues of race are typically ignored for highly privileged ethnic and cultural portrayals and issues of assimilation/acculturation (Uba, 2002).

What Are the Problems with Using Modernist Psychology to Examine Racial Issues,

Specifically Asian Americans' Racial Issues?

Modern psychology privileges a version of the scientific method which emphasizes the use of concepts and categories to study phenomena through the use of control groups and by controlling variables. As stated in the first chapter, four assumptions operate in modernist science: (1) knowledge reflects an unadulterated imprint of reality; (2) the reality studied by scientists is stable and ordered by laws; (3) parsimonious explanations are best; and (4) the scientific method provides an accurate

and objective foundation for knowledge (Uba, 2002). Inherent in modernist methodology

is the assumption of an "I," an assumed norm or a natural way of being. In contrast to this

"I," there is the "other" that deviates from the norm by degrees or constructed categories.

In the realm of racial minority research, this assumption of a white deracialized "I"

frames the way psychology approaches the study of race relations. For example:

> By and large, minorities and people in other countries have been studied to test
> the universality of behavior patterns found primarily among European Americans
> (Gergen et al, 1996; S. Sue & Morishima, 1982). When minorities are not viewed
> as part of "us" but instead as "other," focusing on how they might deviate from
> white normality is considered a natural framework. For that reason, some
> psychologists expect white control groups in studies of minorities but not
> minority control groups in studies of white Americans (S. Sue, 1999); attempts to
> explain concentrate on those behaviors that are unexpected because they differ
> from those of white Americans; and when cultural differences are used to account
> for the different survey responses of minority Americans and European
> Americans, they are customarily aimed only at explaining the behavior of the
> former. (Uba, 2002, p. 53)

> The ruts left along the "Other" conceptual trail, long embedded deep in America,
> can still trip the unaware. Mainstream psychology has portrayed minorities in
> terms of white Americans, who are typically treated as simply normal humans and
> the basis for normative standards—not a surprising move given Foucault's view
> that normalcy is defined by those with power. (Uba, 2002, p. 53)

In popular culture, the use of American racial "others" has been used to uphold

American ideological values of individualism, egalitarianism, progressiveness and

freedom. These values are rooted in humanism, a Western movement which developed

during the Renaissance era. Humanism is a general worldview with philosophical

assumptions about what comprises human nature, human inquiry, and the relationships of

human beings to the natural world. This world view challenged prior philosophies that

assumed a divine order. Humanistic values include equality, freedom, tolerance, secularism, social and political reform, pragmatism, scientism, and the perfectibility of human nature (Audi, 1995).

The use of the racial "other" in psychology studies of Asian Americans also uphold American ideological values. For example, consider the use of common dichotomous variables used to contrast a white American self-identity with that of an Eastern Orientalized identity. Such privileged variables include characterizations of foreign-born/American-born, East/West, collectivistic/individualistic, traditional/Americanized, and patriarchal/egalitarian among others. In addition, these privileged variables are often used partially, because to do so fits with the demands of an idealized scientific method (Uba, 2002).

Because modernist methodologies operate from a deracialized white "I," the perception of the racial "other" infiltrates all levels of modernist research, including an authoritative author, the use of dominant defining variables, and texts which translate to particularly privileged results and interpretations. Subsequently, this bias leads to an increased likelihood of finding outcomes that are intentionally sought (Uba, 2002). In effect, narratives of "subjects" are translated and transformed into the method-determined realities of the authority. Adding insult to injury, these results operate in our society as "objective" factual claims. Herein lie distinct differences in the treatment of research findings from a modern versus postmodern standpoint. In modernist psychology, research findings are treated as facts on the basis of assumptions of neutrality and objectivity. Postmodern psychologists would contend however, that these same findings are far from

neutral facts, but instead are constructed narratives that can be explored for their multiple levels of experience and meanings.

<div align="center">What is an Alternative Postmodern Methodology?</div>

In postmodern thinking, it is important to examine not "what" a phenomenon means, but the "how" a phenomenon has come to be understood. In a field dominated by the examination of "what" a phenomenon is, there are clear limits to the empirical science of psychology that privilege particular variables, narratives and interpretations. The need to deconstruct and de-privilege dominant and oppressive views becomes vitally important.

Deconstruction has been characterized as "uncovering taken-for-granted, unprivileged narratives; disrupting conventional meanings by revealing the instability and ambiguity of meanings; and revealing sociohistorical purposes behind constructions" (Uba 2002, p. 73). Deconstruction first focuses on binary opposites, shows how the two are related (how one is central and the other is marginalized), and then temporarily subverts the hierarchy to make the text mean the opposite of its original intent. Lastly and more importantly, both terms are left in a non-hierarchical, non-stable meaning. In this state, the polarities can be simultaneously held in mind and the relationship between then examined (Sarup, 1989). Through the use of deconstruction, psychology becomes an important tool to question and examine ideology. An example of this is Uba's (2002) work:

Research findings that Asian Americans are more likely than white Americans to be self-effacing, deferential, and willing to assume blame is customarily interpreted in terms of Asian cultural values (e.g., Connor, 1975; Fenz & Arkoff, 1962; Weisz, 1989). If we were to reconsider those findings by treating the white Americans' behaviors as the ones to be explained, we might conclude that compared to Asian Americans, white Americans are likely to assume a superior position, not give in, and avoid blame. Instead of recycling vague cultural explanations, such an interpretation would raise new questions, including "Why might white Americans behave that way?" And "What does this finding tell us about how Asian Americans and white Americans are socially, economically, and politically situated?" By exploring inverted dichotomies, deconstruction is subversive, digging beneath the surface of social relations and behaviors and uncovering buried, oppressive patterns. (p. 37)

In the following section, I will summarize selected aspects of Uba's (2002) deconstructed analyses of existing literature about Asian Americans.

What Does Deconstructing Orientalizing Narratives of Asian Americans Tell Us About Race Relations and Ideology?

Narratives on Culture

Mainstream psychology most often refers to culture in descriptions of the different or "other" (e.g., discussions of gender differences or in cross-cultural psychology); essentialized views of Asian Americans and Latino/a Americans as Asians and Latino/a respectively, reinforce that tendency. Less honored are narratives emphasizing Asian Americans' identification with the United States, their gender, or age cohort, for example. (Uba, 2002, p. 86)

Culture is a highly privileged descriptor for Asian Americans. One way to investigate the meaning of Asian Americans and their culture is to analyze the narratives of how American culture describes itself in relation to Asian cultures in the form of

myths, national policies and other narratives (Lowe, 1998). In the literature, there is a

specific use of privileged dichotomous descriptors of American versus Asian culture.

These descriptors include individualistic/collectivistic, contemporary/centuries-old,

progressive/traditional, egalitarian/patriarchal, and free-will/deterministic.

> Although the conceptualization of any culture could be deconstructed in reference to an endless galaxy of texts, the concept of culture in discussions of Asian American cultures is typically and broadly constructed in relation to only two, hyperprivileged signifying poles, mainstream U.S. and Asian—particularly, "traditional" Asian—cultures. In this false opposition, other minority cultures are largely ignored; and U.S. and Asian (American) cultures are cast as mutually exclusive and oppositional. This bifurcation, reinforced by stereotypes, is replicated in popular parlance and it affects the identity of Asian Americans… (Uba, 2002, pp. 84-85)

The anti-American ideological values for Asians are also assumed to be an

enduring, essential core of those perceived as racially "Asian." These portrayals imply a

stable sense of enduring values motivating behaviors across situations (Feldman, Mont-

Reynard, & Rosenthal, 1992). Such assumptions enable racist views and racist political

agendas such as the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II.

> Fitting within that framework and underpinning many comparisons of ethnic groups is the assumption that ethnicity is a marker for cultural characteristics. Moreover, those characteristics are commonly assumed to be based on the heritage of a centuries-old culture. In public discourse, even those Asian Americans several generations removed from their immigrant ancestors supposedly retain deeply ingrained Asian cultural influences impermeable or only dimly influenced by experiences in the United States. This portrayal has supported interpersonal bias as well as political and economic agendas, as in efforts to rationalize the incarceration of Japanese Americans during WWII with a "Once a 'Jap' always a 'Jap'" mentality. In those situations, the purported deeply ingrained values and behavior patterns implicitly reflect unchanging Asian

cultures; consequently, how long ago the emigration took place is deemed irrelevant. (Uba, 2002, pp. 85-86)

There is a widespread assumption in modern psychology that cultural attitudes, values and behaviors initially brought to America by perceived foreign "others" exist with impenetrable boundaries. In actuality, these cultural elements operate for everyone with great permeability in changing national, region-specific and local contexts.

Narratives on Cultural Norms

As described in the first chapter, there are problematic assumptions in the immigrant analogy. All racial groups are evaluated on a fixed continuum or equal footing. In a particular setting, such as a school setting, a deracialized white American student norm could be compared to an Asian American student norm or a black American student norm. If there are differences in how the racially grouped students differ, then the blame or credit falls to the cultural values of each racial group. Under the immigrant analogy, there is the assumption that specific racial group norms are due to their racial cultural values, and not to social-environmental influences. These racial cultural values are further essentialized as an enduring core characteristic of the racial group in question. In the case of Asian Americans, the enduring cultural values are further deemed deterministic.

Cultural explanations are made to seem natural or even like a deterministic set of influences (e.g. , "Asian Americans don't get into crime much because of their culture"). Why did the Asian American behave the way they did? The

deterministic and reductionistic reply is "Their culture made them do that." Even a chicken crossing the road is assigned more agency than that. Simple cultural explanations only seem natural and sufficient in a void created by removing free will, burying society's disparities, and ignoring other texts. (Uba, 2002, p. 93)

In psychology literature on Asian Americans, there is a hyperprivileging of "traditional" cultural characteristics (e.g., Confucian values, filial piety, not losing face) that "explain" or determine Asian Americans' personality and behaviors. When cultural characteristics are used to explain why individuals are the way they are, the social context and environmental factors (e.g., racism) are largely ignored.

Viewing culture and dominant narratives about it as contemporary constructions serving contemporary purposes helps to contextualize them. For example, whereas in Kosovo, the culture of an ethnic group can trigger violence, in the United States culture is generally a more benign and less controversial basis for differences than socioeconomic status or race. Here, cultural explanations do not challenge the myths of American acceptance of cultural diversity and equal opportunity. Much as the model minority stereotype is used as a bludgeon against other minorities and as a way of emphasizing what is reportedly brought to situations rather than structural restrictions, the privileging of cultural descriptions and explanations of Asian Americans' behaviors displaces, represses, and negates explanations in terms of other influences, notably socioeconomic status, race, and oppressive practices. (Uba, 2002, p. 94)

Narratives on Stereotypes

The cultural values most identified in the literature for Asian Americans operate in conjunction with existing stereotypes. For Asian Americans, privileged cultural values of filial piety and not losing face, for instance, hold connotations with the model minority stereotype. Importantly, this speaks to psychology's need to understand the constructed

nature of racial "other" narratives in the form of stereotyped portrayals, in order to avoid

colluding with racism. In one example, Uba (2002) deconstructs the model minority

stereotype in relation to power dynamics:

> Deconstruction of the model minority stereotype also exposes an underlying ideology that promotes behaviors reminiscent of characteristics a medieval king might want of his subjects: hard-working, law-abiding, and not likely to upset the status quo. It shows that the concept presumes the standpoint of a dominating individual or group, a set of values, and the entitlement to define model behaviors. Surely, if sophisticated understanding of oppression were a criterion of model behaviors, a dominating group would rarely deserve to be the model much less be in the cognitive position of the defining model awareness. Analysis of power and oppressiveness behind the stereotype as a sign would show how it attenuates allowable behaviors and assigns a tenuous acceptance: Challenge the status quo and the "praise" is replaced with charges of bumptiousness (see Woo, 2000). (Uba, 2002, p. 78)

Hyperprivileged cultural "traits" and stereotypes operate similarly in the service of an

Orientalizing effect on Asian Americans. When a racial group is viewed through

preconceived stereotypes, no further exploration of external causes for its social,

economic, and political placement in society tends to be sought.

> Stereotypes frequently serve power interests. For example, casting stereotyped behaviors as somehow natural deflects attention away from other bases for people's behaviors, such as discrimination or poverty. Further hinting at the power issues underlying stereotypes and racial narratives, racially subordinated groups are sometimes not disparaged because of their purportedly lack of character, but instead resented because of their success: In a contemporary extension of an old view-point, those white Americans who regard themselves as simply standard humans sometimes define the successful nonwhite as somehow unfairly superhuman. (Uba, 2002, p. 78)

Because the reification of race was born of prejudice intent, an understanding of race needs to be viewed in relation to racism. Stereotypical narratives, one way racism operates, are important texts to examine.

> Stereotypes constitute texts that people use to create meaning, interpret their environment and their place in it, and motivate and justify their behavior. Therefore, regarding racial stereotypes as narrative attempts to define "others" exposes and contextualizes additional uses of the concept of race. Doing so turns racial stereotypes into forums for investigating ideology, differences in power over narratives, and the interpersonal meanings of being Asian American. (Uba, 2002, p. 78)

Narratives on Acculturation/Assimilation

Consider the strong link between assimilation and acculturation, and consider how degree of acculturation is privileged in narratives about groups of color, especially Asian Americans. As noted in Chapter I, there is an underlying assumption in assimilation/acculturation that non-white Americans need to assimilate or "be more like" white Americans. This automatically activates an "us" versus "others," or insider/outsider and citizen/foreigner mentality. In fact, both in the literature (e.g., Jeong & Schumm, 1990) and in popular conversation, non-Asian Americans are referred to as Americans, whereas Asian Americans are often referred to as Asians, implying that Asian Americans are not really Americans:

> when many foreign-born Asian Americans and white Americans refer to "Americans," they mean white Americans; they refer to minorities as, for example, "Asian" or "Latino." The foreign-born are demonstrating a sense of alienation from the concept of "American." That way of thinking is reinforced

when the terms "acculturation" and "Americanization" are used as codes for being indistinguishable from white Americans. It is manifested in conversation when "all-American good looks" almost always refers to someone white. Insofar as acculturation is the product of teaching thinking habits, values, and versions of knowledge that define a culture, acculturated schoolchildren learn a limited meaning of being American. They are socialized into thinking that the history of white Americans is American history, for example; and overlooking the history of minorities sends the old message, "If you're not white, you're not right," –or, "you don't matter." (Uba, 2002, p. 98)

Groups whose racial identity is subsumed under culture are characterized as perpetual foreigners, no matter how many generations have lived in America. When considered a perpetual foreigner, one must not make waves or risk being kicked out. The group's sense of loyalty is constantly questioned, whether in research (e.g., Feldman, Mont-Reynaud, & Rosenthal, 1992; Lien, 1994) or in popular conversation.

In popular conversation, when immigrants or people of color do not become sufficiently like the dominant group in ways it sanctions, their identity, loyalty to the United States, and good citizenship are questioned. Acculturation and assimilation become equated with "good" citizenship, as in a rationalization for the World War II internment of Japanese Americans on the grounds that they were unassimilable. (That rationale overlooked the fact that they were prevented by racism from structurally assimilating.). (Uba, 2002, p. 99)

The metaphor of assimilation/acculturation most discussed in U.S. social sciences is that it is a developmental and adaptive progression of outsider or guest moving into a "host's home" (e.g., Blanchard, 1991; Feldman, Mont-Reynaud, & Rosenthal, 1992; Lien, 1994). An Asian country is commonly referred to as the "home country" whereas the United States is considered the "host" culture.

> Even extending beyond official restrictions on naturalizations, as exemplified by the 1970 Naturalization Act which restricted naturalization to the white, the United States has long been regarded viscerally as a white man's country; the United States and white Americans are still viewed as the "hosts" not only to the foreign-born but to all people of color except Aboriginal Americans. Therefore, the social meaning of acculturation and its privileging as a text have long been linked with race: Even when people of color have become very acculturated, they have still been considered to be outsiders. (Uba, 2002, p. 96)

In acculturation/assimilation metaphors, we see white Americans as "true" Americans who courteously host other immigrant groups in their country.

> The implication of this metaphor is that, for the most part, the foreign-born and people of color have the status of guests, which implies a not-fully integrated status. Those regarded as guests must be on their best behavior, earn their rights, and fit into the standards established by the owners of the home without becoming overly familiar—or they are not welcome. (Uba, 2002, p. 96)

As a host, one has ownership over the home and therefore the right to ultimately decide the fate of the "home" in its governing policies, social order and beliefs. The host takes on a powerful position, embodying the entitlement to accept or reject all "others." On the other hand, the guest is deemed without rights to the "home." A guest has limited power and agency, and is expected to politely accept any generous offerings from the host. A guest is expected to conform and not make waves or otherwise risk being unwelcomed, unwanted, and forced out of the home.

Chapter Conclusion: What is the Bottom Line?

The manner in which modernist psychology approaches research on Asian Americans parallels problematic issues regarding national race relations and oppression. In focusing specifically on Asian Americans, examining dominant narratives on Orientalized racial "other" teaches us how America constructs a national ideological identity, preserves ideological (humanistic) values in the face of social inequities, and justifies power hierarchies between groups. Further psychological inquiries from this perspective may include exploring how American ideological identity is transmitted and embodied in us, understanding the relationship between an internalized ideological identity and psychological health, and discerning how these ideological values operate on personal and interpersonal levels. Such speculations are discussed in the next chapter.

In postmodern discourse, in observing any phenomenon, it is important not only to analyze the existing narratives in what is said, but also to focus on what is not said. Postmodern methodologies like deconstruction provide one approach in which absent, unquestioned "I" narratives come to light. For too long, psychology has operated from an assumption of a white deracialized "I" perspective in viewing racial "others." In our modernist-dominated field, where words like "diversity" and "multiculturalism" automatically trigger visions of the racial "other," psychological investigation via postmodern methodologies is needed to examine overarching narratives of racial "others" and what that says about "I." These narratives can then contextualize issues of national identity, ideology and oppression. Utilizing current research results as narrative "data" to investigate American ideology (instead of colluding with their unquestioned transmission

of dominant American values) has far-reaching implications. By facilitating our ability to

observe our use of racial "others," it would have profound implications for an authentic

quest for social equality. The need for modernist psychology to expand from its roots to

incorporate postmodernism then moves from a more abstract philosophical debate to a

social justice issue. Currently, psychologists are in a unique position to challenge

oppression, as opposed to participating in oppressive practices.

From our inability to recognize race in all its complexity, there has been a

glaring lack of:

> racialized views of various American groups, complex racial experiences,
> differences in perceptions of and responses to racism, ways racial
> experiences might affect behaviors, reasons people use or do not use racial
> narratives, ways members of one minority might treat those of another
> minority group as 'others,' or ways people do or do not think that their
> race has affected their lives and outlooks. (Uba, 2002, p. 80)

In other words, racial dynamics and experience have been deemed unnecessary to

explore, because of their marginal effect on deracialized individuals. In fact,

according to Audre Lorde (1984), the expectation of the dominant members of a

culture is that "it is the responsibility of the oppressed to teach the oppressors

their mistakes" (p. 124). The exploration of complex racial dynamics include all

people, whether largely deracialized, racialized or somewhere in between. Racial

dynamic research becomes not about studying one racial group in isolation, but

instead becomes an investigative forum for how racial groups function in relation

to each other. When these narratives are brought to light, there can be clear and

specific implications for legislation and policy, and services as well as the needs

of psychology in the social betterment of all.

CHAPTER IV

RACIAL DYNAMICS IN CLINICAL PRACTICE

Introduction

A postmodern approach to psychology would enable the field to explore complex racial dynamics. Chapter IV is dedicated to discussing its implications for clinical treatment. Case vignettes are used to illustrate when a racial "other" is in operation in treatment. Such vignettes offer an opportunity to evaluate how a shift in thinking by the therapist to a postmodern interpretation of racial dynamics can facilitate an understanding of specific client/therapist interactions. Finally, this chapter further argues that a new approach to understanding race not only enriches the field and increases its value to society, but is fundamentally an issue of social justice.

What Do We Know About Racial Dynamics and Clinical Practice?

How do racial dynamics affect the therapeutic process? If we look towards the existing psychological research, there are more questions than answers. In fact, the field focuses on ignoring complex racial dynamics and instead asks questions that tend to essentialize "others." The complex ways in which racial dynamics affect our cultural

experience and interact with our perceptions, judgments, behaviors, and actions are seldom explored. This phenomenon is congruent with the prevailing American assumption of, and bias toward deracialized individuals. Since racial dynamics are not usually social obstacles to deracialized individuals, the burden of racial issues falls to those most marginalized by them.

This chapter will consider questions about racial dynamics such as: What do racial dynamics look like in therapy? What do they signify? How should racial dynamics be attended to in therapy? What is the relationship between American ideological values and psychological difficulties? In what ways are racial dynamics relevant to everyone? Where do racial dynamics fall in the discussion about universal versus culturally-specific therapies? Are there social positions/power differentials being activated? What do these positions signify? What is the impact of these social positions/power differentials on the therapeutic relationship and the treatment?

In psychology research and practice, the difficulties associated with racial dynamics and social justice issues in the greater society are not magically excluded from operation. Western psychology is characterized by its modernist underpinnings with long traditions of enlightenment values about the nature of existence and knowledge. Behavioral sciences emerged from an epistemological stance of logical empiricism (Scriven, 1969), whereas some (e.g. Messer, Woolfolk, & Sass, 1988) consider psychoanalysis of having a more hermeneutic stance by comparison. In both orientations, racial dynamics have traditionally been underexplored or explored in the context of the dominant culture's assumptions.

Postmodernism and Psychological Orientations

In contemporary times, increasing awareness of issues of oppression and underrepresentation has lead to postmodern developments within specific therapy traditions, as well as to new forms of therapies that represent a vast departure from modernist philosophical underpinnings. Family/systems, group, and multicultural theories, by virtue of their nature, already emphasize social connectedness rather than an "asocial" personal experience. The advent of multicultural psychology has profoundly changed the landscape of American psychology, making issues of "diversity" an increasing priority in the field. The American Psychological Association (2003) has published guidelines that advocate a multicultural focus in education, training, research, practice, and organizational change for psychologists. Despite this major milestone, race, culture, and ethnicity are prone to falling into the modernist trap of being treated as discrete, essentializing, stable concepts in psychology's literature, training, and practice.

Still, shifts in behavioral, cognitive-behavioral, cognitive, family/systems, organizational, psychodynamic and psychoanalytic traditions are constantly developing. For instance, originating from a family/systems perspective and representing a philosophical shift, narrative therapy (White & Epston, 1990) has become increasingly popular in the last decade. Narrative work is located in post-structuralism (e.g., Foucault, 1979; 1980) and postmodern and social constructionist ideas (e.g., Gergen, 1985). From this perspective, the "truth" in ideas and practices are challenged, and alternative understandings of what a person and problem are and how change occurs are offered.

In psychodynamic and psychoanalytic contemporary thinking, there has been an increasing recognition of narrative truth within a social constructivist model (Hoffman, 1991). The movement towards relational theories includes an understanding of the intersubjective space, a transitional space where therapist and client create context and meaning from central organizing relational patterns and narratives of a patient's early life that becomes reenacted in treatment. There are expectations of transferential and countertransferential pulls in therapy, culminating in ever-present reenactments.

Despite this era of greater philosophical awareness in psychology, the introduction of race and other emotionally loaded social identity constructs has tended to concretize psychological dialogues regarding similarities and differences. For race, ethnicity and culture, I believe that this concretization can be attributed to our assumptions of the racial "other" and its incongruence with our American ideological identity.

American Identity: Our Internalized Ideological Framework

Culture is a way of life, a co-creation of any group consisting of two or more people. The cultural base referred to in this section is our ever-evolving national political and social climate and its governing American ideology. As previously noted, Asian American narratives in psychology serve to define and uphold American ideological values. Different national cultures transmit different ideological values. Given our socialization within the context of a greater culture, we need to examine the psychological processes implicated in the transmission of cultural values.

From an individual standpoint, we are born into a preexisting context of societal prejudices. These systemized prejudices predate us. We grow up in this frame where direct experience confirms an arranged system of beliefs about the way the world is hierarchically organized. Complex racial dynamics are embedded in every part of the American way of life, internalized in each individual existing within the system. The way complex racial dynamics are embedded in the organization of American identity reflects our own internalized organization of what constitutes right or wrong, what is morally acceptable, valued and expected, and what constitutes justice and fairness. When external experience challenges our inner ethical foundation, we distort our experience by attending to the narratives that fit our frame. This dynamic value system and its reinforcing properties are transmitted to members of society in different ways, depending on the constitution of the individual. In turn, our actions that reflect our assumptions reinforce our national ideology. These bi-directional forces constitute an aspect of our "American-ness." After all, our collective and individual identity is reinforced on a daily basis in school, where we chant our alliance to "one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all." To feel accepted within American culture requires a consensual belief in America's just treatment of its people. Therefore, our collective and individual American identity is in part facilitated by the construction of racialized "others." Racial inequities, a direct contradiction to our American ideology, are then blamed on those racialized in the service of maintaining American ideology.

In challenging societal injustices, first we must acknowledge what is at stake. As Fairbairn (1944) stated, it is "better to be a sinner in a world ruled by God, than a saint in a world ruled by the Devil. A sinner in a world ruled by God may be bad, but there is

always a sense of security to be derived from the fact that the world around is good…In any case, there is always hope of redemption" (pp. 66-67). In other words, our preservation of an image of the world as good, just, and safe is paramount to our survival. In a world ruled by the devil, the sinner has no hope of redemption, and is also bad because the world around him is bad.

In dealing with racial inequalities, we are confronted with differing ways "bad" exists in the external world, and we tend to operates with internalized dynamics that promote our sense of security and safety. In other words, we need to sustain a sense of order and control over "why bad things happen" and ensure in our mind that bad things happen only to those deserving of them. In particular, American ideology is transmitted in popular culture, where the vast majority of movies end with stories in which the "good guys" win and the "bad guys" lose. The psychic investment in this belief and the maintenance of this belief and its trajectory in one's own personality are complex and differ depending on the individual and cultural context. However, what is at stake is a challenge to our very sense of security in the world, where intentions and actions do not correspond to fair consequences. What is at stake is a challenge to our own internalized group stability, without which we might feel unpredictable chaos and fears.

To fully recognize racial inequalities and our participation in their continuation requires a process of continually confronting our internalized American ideological system, deconstructing layers of assumptions about what constitute right and wrong, and scrutinizing the ways we benefit and lose in maintaining a false American ideology. It also requires grief over the loss of idealistic presumptions, such as that we "can do

anything we set our minds to" in the "land of the free." In effect, our comforting belief that we are in control of our destiny is lost when we confront racial complexities.

For individuals in America, challenges to social inequities require constant confrontation of how we are invested in and perceive the "other." Only through such confrontation can true change be facilitated such that American identity and American values are not in contradiction. Collectively, we can invest in our righteous indignation at the injustices of the world. We can finally progress from a state of self-blinding paralysis to a state of greater agency and freedom.

Self and "Other" in Therapy: Identification and Disidentification

Self-identity is facilitated through the construction of a dichotomous "other" (Sampson, 1993). Therefore, self, which is central and privileged, is constructed in relation to what it is not. This "other" is an inauthentic creation, a distorted, split-off representation of the self. The boundary between self and "other" becomes rigid and unstable, and therefore brittle. In confronting the "other," we begin the process of integrating aspects of the disavowed "other," making the boundary between self and "other" permeable and fluid. This fluid exchange allows space for complexity and increases tolerance of ambiguity, which makes the self more integrated, consolidated, cohesive and stable.

In order to confront the "other" in therapy, therapists need to be aware of the centrality of identification. From a psychoanalytic frame, Moss (2003) discusses how therapy is comprised of identifications between therapist and client. The work demands

sustaining identifications with the clients' ongoing sense of past, present and future. He describes how the "clinical work aims, via identification, to bring immediate idea and imagined effect into vital union" (Moss, 2003, p. xxi), maintaining that therapy is about working with dynamics and determinants in the moment while being able to imagine a new possibility. If the identification lies only in the patient's future, then there is a false pursuit of getting "better." If one cannot identify with the patient's improved future, then the identification remains and stays in the present. Moss speaks of challenges to identification especially when working with systemized hatreds like racism, homophobia, and misogyny, and describes how the effects of these systemized hatreds consequently deprive us of secure points of identification, producing vacillating feelings of alienation, excitement and moral condemnation.

Racial Dynamics: Therapy Themes

From the previous discussion, we can extract several themes regarding racial dynamics in America. These are:

1. Essentialized Race and Racial Illusion

2. The Concept of Racialization and Deracialization

3. Deracialized Norm versus Racialized Group Norm

In terms of Asian Americans, we can be more specific in these themes:

1. Orientalized Race and Deracialized Illusion

    a. Outsider (versus insider) Mentality

    b. Powerless Guest (versus Entitled Host/Ruler)

    c. Deterministic Mentality (versus Free-Will/Agency)

2. Fluctuating Racialization and Deracialization

3. Deracialized Norm versus "Orientalized" Group Norm

These themes also exist for other racial groups, but tend to be hyperprivileged in narratives on Asian Americans in relation to white Americans. The deconstruction of where Asian Americans are in relation to white Americans holds connotations for understanding overall American race relations and cultural identity. Therefore, these themes are not for use in understanding one group in isolation from another, but for exploring how one functions in relation to the other. In general, these positions are not mutually exclusive, but interrelated.

These themes are possible points of orientation in thinking about racial dynamics, not an attempt to capture the rich vastness of racial issues. Complex racial dynamics cannot be understood as preconceived structures or mental configurations. The use of a deconstructed analysis of racial dynamics may add another layer to case conceptualizations regardless of theoretical orientation. Let us see these themes in action:

Case Vignettes

In therapy, to focus on one's racial, ethnic or cultural background in isolation is inauthentic, essentializing and reductionistic. Nor is therapy about ignoring complex racial dynamics, colluding with a deracialized norm. Examining "race, culture or ethnicity" should not stop at learning an "other's" essentializing portrayal, but holding the frame of its narrative function for the client and therapist dyad. In the case of Asian Americans, these essentializing portrayals come in the form of Orientalizing narratives on ethnicity and culture. This ability to work with racial dynamics, of course, assumes that the therapist is able to recognize essentializing narratives versus a more locally created sense of cultural identity. This holds clinical implications on a training level of the importance of teaching how the racial "other" is socially constructed.

Case Vignette 1.

Amrita was a 27-year-old Asian Indian American female. She entered therapy with a presenting problem of sleep difficulties. As the therapist, a white American female, began inquiring more of her family situation, the client spoke of her marital difficulties with her Asian Indian American husband by arranged marriage. Initially, Amrita was hesitant to share her home environment, but over time, she began sharing stories of domestic violence by her husband. Amrita's descriptions were infused with comments of "the way it was" in Asian Indian culture, and of her need to submit to her husband's authority. When the therapist, who was unfamiliar with Asian Indian culture,

tried to inquire about her cultural background, Amrita would promptly inform the therapist in an authoritarian manner of her cultural and ethnic traditions and would cut off any future inquiries.

In this case, the therapist felt trapped: How can the therapist learn about Amrita's culture without seeming to reject or accept it at face value? The therapist's perception of the racial "other" is automatically activated in assuming her need to know an essentialized Indian American culture. Here, we see how the client and therapist are implicitly participating in a dominant deracialized norm (white deracialized culture is assumed to have egalitarian values) versus an Orientalized racial norm (Asian culture is assumed to have dominating patriarchal values). Both parties are consequently in a disidentification. The therapist felt held hostage in the room, without space to explore the issue of the client's cultural background. She felt she only had two options: either accept at face value the deterministic Orientalized identity that the client rigorously defended, or appear prejudiced and rejecting of her cultural difference. Communication about Amrita's locally created sense of culture is essentially stripped. Whenever the therapist inquired about her background, Amrita would act defensively, as if the therapist were questioning her authority over her own cultural background.

On the other hand, we can speculate about Amrita's Orientalizing self-story. In American Orientalized narratives, Amrita is a powerless guest, an outsider with her culture pre-determining her situation. In owning her Orientalized story, she becomes the authority, the entitled host/ruler, the insider of her essentialized cultural identity. By doing this, she puts the therapist in the position of an outsider, a powerless guest with no agency. By continuing in this fashion, the disidentification between the dyad continues,

creating greater distance with no hope of the therapist or client influencing each other. The client continues in frustration and isolation about her situation. Her essentializing belief may be an attempt to separate her deficient "culture" from herself/"I," and may give her an unintegrated understanding of her situation (her need to "submit") and of "the way it is." Her blaming the culture ultimately gives her some control over her situation, but, because she identifies as being a part of the Orientalized culture, she also feels deficient and trapped.

Case Vignette 2.

Jordan was a 22-year-old African American female with an extensive trauma history. Because of her severe depression and subsequent inability to care for her child, her 5-year-old daughter was removed from her care and placed into foster care. It was at this time that she was referred for therapy by Child Protective Services, to facilitate the process of reunification. In initial meetings, she appeared highly emotional and extremely reactive. Her thinking was often chaotic and disorganized, and she seemed to jump from one state of crisis to another. I, a 28-year-old Asian American female, worked with her in individual therapy at her home for two years.

Although Jordan's case was dominated by clinical themes of violent trauma, the issue of "I" and racial "other" oriented us to times of identification and disidentification. Initially, therapy targeted helping her self-monitor and evaluate her thoughts, affects and behaviors in relation to deciding the fate of her newly discovered pregnancy. Under the watchful eyes of Child Protective Services, an organizational system perceived as both

punishing and supportive, Jordan was facing the potential loss of her daughter, and, in deciding the fate of her pregnancy, the potential loss of another child. This conflict was further complicated by the understanding that a decision to carry out her pregnancy could potentially have a negative impact on the judge's decision of whether to reinstate her parental rights with her daughter. In facing this overwhelming decision, memories of past betrayals and disorganizing losses were continuously triggered. In her strong identification with her daughter, "an abandoned child in the foster care system," Jordan spoke at length of her heightened fears for her "unprotected" daughter in a world of physical abusers and sexual predators. Therapy sought to contain the disorganizing grief and regressions, as fragmented memories of her abusive past flooded Jordan. In her dissociative process, Jordan was unable to recall the content of various therapy sessions for several months during this time despite constant repetition of some of the material.

In addition, relational patterns of expected betrayals were enacted in the therapy, when issues of safety became salient. As Jordan disclosed the occurrence of episodic domestic violence in her romantic partnership, issues of confidentiality with a client in a Child Protective Services system (where individuals have their parental rights removed) arose. The continuous dilemma of maintaining and breaking confidentiality reflected an ongoing pattern of expected betrayals and the perceived fine line between protection and abuse. Jordan's complicated perception of this therapist as an uninvolved betraying caregiver (i.e., turn a blind eye to violence, allowing the physical abuse to continue), and betraying abuser (i.e., breaking confidentiality and punishing her by jeopardizing her case) continuously oscillated throughout all phases of the treatment. Also, increasing

desires for the therapist to be omnipotent and rescue her from her situation were apparent in this phase and increasingly present in later phases of the therapy.

In Jordan's narrative, my difficulty involved around tolerating and containing the disorganizing and helpless feelings associated with extreme betrayals and losses. To identify with her situation required a level of openness in challenging my privileged standing in relation to hers, an issue, I repeatedly discussed with my supervisor, colleagues and particularly my therapist. Jordan tended to racialize me, "I was the only black person at the register and you know what they were thinking," or deracialize me "You talk all fancy" (imitating my "white" speech) depending on whether she was feeling close or distant.

I fell into numerous traps of viewing her as the racial "other" as she superficially fit an essentializing stereotype of a "poor black welfare mother with a problematic culture." I oscillated between viewing her as a "lost soul" in my ultimately good safe world, and feeling disorganized and out-of-control "like her" in a world with no order and justice. My feelings of guilt and relief were noticeable after sessions as I retreated to my own safer and more privileged world.

Jordan lived in what she termed the "curse of poverty." In several consecutive sessions, she complained of the stresses of paying bills, and was greatly upset over a particularly high energy bill which was just over $300.00. With great enthusiasm, operating as a "struggling" graduate student, I "empathically" expressed similar horror at the feeling she must be experiencing at having to pay such a disportionately high bill in a very cold month. In further discussion over the course of several sessions, I slowly realized my grievous error that highlighted our socioeconomic difference: I assumed she

had a practice of paying her bills in full. Jordan eventually relayed how it was an accumulated bill; and of her practice of paying monthly bills in part. This practice, which accrued more penalties (with late fees), also allowed her to be more conservative with her money month-to-month.

In my desperate desire to identify with her, I, in effect, attempted to falsely make her more "like me." My identification point as a "struggling and poor" graduate student "I" was confronted by my representation of an essentialized poor racial "other." My systematic imposing of my framework on her would have been harmful, and would have served to make her feel unnatural, limited, deficient and false.

Chapter Conclusion

These two case examples highlight a number of important issues:

1. Racial dynamics are complicated. Not only does the concept race operate in different ways for different groups, but it is intimately linked to "its perceived relation to wealth, power, criminal behavior, and nationality, and the unstable significance of racial-minority status. For example, people are embedded in multiple layers of potential minority statuses (i.e., in school or workplace) or majority status (i.e., within the family)" (Uba, 2002, p. 75). Because racial dynamics encompass so much, examining race as a nominal mutually exclusive category would be false and harmful. In the cases above, the client's racial dynamics encompass more than perceived race, and have implications for ethnicity, wealth, gender, and power, among other statuses.

2. When we learn about another's racial, ethnic or cultural background (traditions and practices) in training or practice, we risk essentializing the "other" if we take what we have learned and view it from the vantage point of our normed standing in society. Having resources to learn about another's cultural background should serve not to prescribe how to understand another, but to challenge us to step outside of operating from "I." For example, in the first case, if the therapist had been unfamiliar with the phenomenon of arranged marriages and the client had chosen not to disclose that her marriage had been arranged, the therapist would have operated from a center of non-arranged marriage practices. In time, the therapist would have subtly imposed her framework of non-arranged marriage practices onto the client, making arranged marriages appear unnatural and inferior. When we are unaware of our location in relation to others, we unconsciously norm "I" and essentialize "other." When this experience is systematic, we can create harm in colluding in the greater culture's ideology of disenfranchising the "other."

3. These two cases illustrate the need for therapists to attend not just to the field of psychology, but to the greater national arena within both the therapist and client dyad exist. Ogden (2005) speaks to this need to be accountable, emphasizing that the responsibility of the analyst is not to the field of psychoanalysis, but to the welfare of the patient. After all, the patient not only lives and works within the terms of the therapeutic frame, but within the context of the social/political situation. In turn, the analyst is

responsible for remaining receptive and responsive not only within the therapy room, but within the context of the greater realities of the outside world.

In clinical practice, all too often categories under "diversity" such as race, ethnicity, and culture are treated in mutually exclusive essentialized ways that collude with the status quo. Rather than facilitating a complex racial dynamic understanding of self and "other," we are invested in splitting off rather than confronting the "other." This largely limits our ability, via identification, to help. In other words, our social location vis-à-vis each other affects our ability to positively influence each other via identifications.

One way to work with complex racial dynamics is to deconstruct psychological narratives on the racial "other" and utilize these points in the therapeutic setting. These deconstructed points of orientation enable us to see when our racial "other" is being activated and thus challenge our reflexive assumptions based on maintaining our internalized ideological framework.

In conclusion, at the heart of social justice regarding race lies in our fluid ability to step outside of our normed standing in society and perceive when a racial "other" is in operation. Without this ability, we are susceptible to colluding in oppressive practices. As psychologists, we are in an ultimate position to learn, examine and facilitate this ability. Facilitating this skill requires a postmodern level of clinical training. Currently, social inequities are either unaddressed, or addressed in a limited manner through "diversity" training. Rather than just learning about different cultural groups and comparing the nuances of their different cultural practices in relation to our "normal" framework,

training needs to incorporate education about our assumptions of the racial "other." Such training would include, for example, learning the history of the American construction of modern race, learning the history of the American construction of different racial "others," and understanding different aspects of racial dynamics. This type of education would facilitate our ability to challenge the way race is currently treated as a nominal, present-versus-absent category in psychology and society at large. In effect, our ability to perceive when a racial "other" is in operation is not only an invaluable clinical skill, but a necessary tool in facilitating lasting social change.

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