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Sungeun Bae

12/1/2011

“No Roller Coasters in China:” Asian Women’s Dating Relationships with White Men

by

Sungeun Bae

Dr. Amanda E. Lewis  
Adviser

Department of Sociology

Dr. Amanda E. Lewis  
Adviser

Dr. Irene Browne  
Committee Member

Dr. Christine Ristaino  
Committee Member

12/1/2011

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Sungeun Bae

Dr. Amanda E. Lewis

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## Abstract

### “No Roller Coasters in China:” Asian Women’s Dating Relationships with White Men By Sungeun Bae

This qualitative study explores Asian women’s experiences in dating relationships with white men. I conduct in-depth interviews with twenty Asian American women, ten foreign-born Asian women (women) and two Asian-white biracial women. I question assumptions that the rising rate of interracial relationships indicates increased assimilation into white culture among minorities. I argue that Asian women engaging in relationships with white men often experience more distinct exclusion from white communities because they date white men, and these dating relationships often cause Asian women to discover the racial boundaries between honorary whites and whites. Additionally, these Asian women were often treated as outsiders by Asian ethnic communities due to the special statuses they gained from dating whites. Thus, they often reported feeling stuck, outsiders to both white and Asian communities. I conclude with suggestions for future research on assimilation theory.

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Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “Hatred paralyzes life; love releases it. Hatred confuses life; love harmonizes it. Hatred darkens life; love illuminates it. This does not mean that we can forget history, but it does suggest that there is hope.” Like Martin Luther King, many people perceive love as the answer to decreasing the animosity between races. Consequently, these people often see hope in interracial relationships between whites and minorities. To fighters for racial equality, it is the acme of racial binding. For some Asian immigrants, having a white partner is part of the American Dream. To assimilation theorists, these relationships indicate the day is approaching when the color line will be blurred.

To learn about Asian women’s dating experiences with white men, I interviewed twenty Asian American women and ten Asian international students who have recently dated white men. Previous researchers have focused on black-white relationships, and while many have studied marital relationships, few have studied dating relationships. Many researchers studying interracial romance assume the increasing rate of interracial relationships will lead to racial assimilation, especially for Asians and Latinos. For instance, Yancey (2002) writes, “understanding who engages in interracial romance is important for assessing the possibility of racial assimilation” (179). Alba (2009) calls racial intermarriage “the litmus test of assimilation” (203). A few scholars, including O’Brien (2008), Nemoto (2009), and Tua (1998), have recently begun to question whether interracial romance leads to assimilation.

In my qualitative study of East and Southeast Asian women who have dated white men, I critique the assumption that interracial romance leads to racial assimilation. For many of my interviewees, dating white men exposed them to certain racial boundaries. In the first section, “I Am (Honorary) White,” I discuss how all my American-born Asian interviewees and most of the international Asian students identified themselves as honorary white. The second section, “No



"You Are Asian," explores Asian women re-identifying their assimilation statuses upon receiving signs the white families they met saw them as Asian, ranging from awkward dinner conversations, to one man who joked with his girlfriend: "Do you know why there are no roller coasters in China? Because no one's tall enough to ride them." In the last section, "Feeling Stuck," I discuss how these Asian women who have dated white men are often considered outsiders by both Asian and white communities. I end with some of the conclusions my interviewees reach because of their feel "stuck."

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are some of the complications Asian women face when dating white men? How do the public, friends, and parents respond to their dating choices?
2. How do Asian women explain the choice to date white men? How do they explain higher rates of Asian women dating whites compared to Asian men?
3. How do Asian women's perceptions of themselves change during the course of their dating relationships with white men?
4. What are some of the expectations Asian women have of their white partners? What are some of the expectations white men have of their Asian partners? Are these expectations based on racial ideologies of Asian women and white men?

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### *General Trends in Interracial Marriages and Dating*

Since the anti-miscegenation laws forbidding interracial marriages were abolished in 1967, the rate of interracial marriages has increased dramatically: "[from] 0.7% of all marriages in 1970 to 5.4% in 2000" (Fu and Hatfield 2008). Rates of interracial marriage vary among different racial groups. For instance, "93% of whites and blacks marry within-group, 70% of

Latinos and Asians do so, and only 33% of Native Americans marry Native Americans” (Bonilla-Silva 2006:192). For immigrants, the rate of intermarriage increases drastically when comparing first generation to third generation immigrants. The third generation immigrants are often “fluent in English and American popular culture [and] share much in common with their peers of the same socioeconomic standing” resulting in a better chance of intermarriage (Root 2001:7). Among Asian immigrants, 15.2% of first generation Chinese immigrant males married interracially whereas 37.1% of third generation Chinese male immigrants did so (Kitano et al. 1984). For first generation Japanese males, 26.1% married interracially whereas 50% of the third generation males engaged in interracial marriages (Kitano et al. 1984).

Proportions of interracial couples vary by region of the United States. For example, more than a quarter of interracial couples reside in California, with “the largest proportion of interracial marriages involving Asian Americans” (Root 2001:7-8). On the other hand, most intermarriage in Oklahoma involves American Indians and whites (Root 2001). In terms of sex and gender, “women (except for black women) intermarry more than their male counterparts,” and “uneven sex ratios influence patterns of intermarriage” (Root 2001:8).

As the rate of interracial marriage increases, so does the rate of interracial dating. Root (2001) presents some statistics about interracial dating over time. In 1997, the *USA Today* newspaper displayed a Gallup Poll of 602 adolescents who stated that 57% of those who date have been involved in interracial relationships. According to Root, this is a 40% increase when compared to data slightly less than two decades ago. In addition, 30% more teens in 1997 compared to two decades ago stated that they would consider dating someone of another race. The current research explores Asian-white interracial dating relationships to understand the implications of this increasing rate of interracial dating.

*Challenges to Interracial Couples- Public Reaction/Perception*

Recently, scholars have been examining the effects of acceptance by the public, peers, and family members in interracial relationships. Okitiki (2010) devotes a large percentage of his book, *Understanding Interracial Relationships*, to investigate the effect of the public's negative views of Black-white couples have on these couples' relationships. He finds interracial couples displaying lower degrees of affection in public than intra-racial couples since they do not feel as comfortable in public as intra-racial couples do. Similarly, Vaquera and Kao's (2008) study compares degrees of interracial couples' affection to degrees of intra-racial couples' affection in public and private. They found, though interracial couples are as affectionate as intra-racial couples in private, interracial couples demonstrate lower degrees of affection in public.

Root (2001) focused her book mostly on parents' reactions to their children marrying interracially. She states that parents who were not accepting of the marriages "often blamed themselves, or conversely, saw their child's choice as an attempt to hurt or reject them" (2001:18). In addition, these parents often threatened out of anger to disown their children in hopes of changing their children's minds. Although there has been some research on intergenerational value conflicts between Asians in interracial relationships and their parents, there is little research on how white parents perceive their sons' Asian girlfriends.

*Interracial Marriage and the Disparity between Asian Women and Men*

Approximately half of U.S.-born Asian Americans marry white Americans (Alba 2009). Researchers often cite similarities between Asians' and whites' socioeconomic and educational statuses to explain the high rate of intermarriage between the two groups. Due to their similar educational and economic statuses, Asian Americans "frequently share residential environments with many whites: analysis of 2000 Census data revealed that the average Asian American

resided in a neighborhood where whites were the majority and Asians formed less than a fifth of the population,” which leads to an even higher chance of Asians marrying whites (Alba 2009:222).

It is important to note, even though both Asian women and men of some national origins (e.g. Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans) have similar educational statuses to whites, Asian women marry whites at a much higher rate than Asian men do. For example, 32% of Chinese men with a bachelor’s degree and above married whites whereas 46.8% of Chinese women with equal an amount of education married whites; 39.3% of college educated Japanese men married whites whereas 48.7% of Japanese women did; 37.5% of Korean men with college education and above married whites whereas 70.4% of Korean women with equal amount of education did (Qian et al. 2006). In other words, the gender gap between Asian women and men is apparent at all levels of education. Scholars have suggested the gender gap results from differing racialized gender ideologies between Asian women and Asian men. Alba (2009) states that “intermarriage far more often involves Asian women than men, and this gender disparity may be fueled by stereotypes about the desirability of the exotic” (204). The racialized gender stereotypes aid Asian women when marrying interracially whereas they work against Asian men.

### *Asian Women’s Stereotypes*

Asian women are often stereotyped as more feminine than white and black women— “more sacrificing, obedient, and domestic” (Root 2001:11). There are two common origins of these stereotypes of Asian women as feminine: immigration history and the media. Historically, the first Asian women to arrive in the U.S. were Chinese. Espirtu (1997) explains the stereotypes surrounding Chinese women: “The stereotypical view that all Chinese women were prostitutes, first formed in the 1850s and continued for almost a century, colored public perceptions of,

attitudes toward, and actions against all Chinese women, regardless of their social standing” (112). These stereotypes were revitalized indirectly by strict immigration policies limiting the entry of Asian women in the late 1800s. The scarcity of Asian women caused the few available Asian women to be forced into prostitution. Because a large proportion of Asian women in the United States at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century turned to or were forced into prostitution, people began to stereotype them as hypersexual and exotic (Pang 1998).

In the media, there have been mixed messages about Asian American women as both submissive and dominant. There are more portrayals of Asian women as submissive than as dominant. Praso (2005) organizes these stereotypes in her book, *The Asian Mystique* (87):

| <i>Submissive (desired)</i>   | <i>Dominant (feared)</i>   |
|---|--|
| Geisha Girl/Lotus Flower/Servant/<br>China Doll: Submissive, docile, obedient,<br>reverential (including Asian men as<br>effeminate, servile) | Dragon Lady: wily, clever, and calculating;<br>powerful but lacking empathy or maternal<br>instinct  |
| Vixen/Sex Nymph: Sexy, coquettish,<br>manipulative; tendency toward disloyalty<br>or opportunism  | Dominatrix: Sexually dominating, icy,<br>emotionless   |
| Prostitute/Victim of Sex Trade/War/<br>Oppression: Helpless, in need of<br>assistance or rescue; good-natured at<br>heart.                    | Martial Arts Mistress (or Master): Cold,<br>distant, steely, capable, with emotions kept<br>in check |
| Enigmatic Oriental: Inscrutable, unpredictable, unknowable, with mysterious and sometimes<br>wise ways  |  |

Some media representations portray Asian women as submissive, making them more desirable, and some portray these women as dominant, and thus, feared. Espiritu (1997) states that the depiction of Asian women with traditional feminine characteristics is “part of a broader program of hegemonic recuperation, a program that has at its main focus the reconstruction of white masculine power” (98). Praso (2005) provides an example of two white men conversing, commenting on how Asian women are not only beautiful but also archetypal. Nemoto (2009) explores in her book, *Racing Romance*, the idea of Asian women as archetypal, “good wi[ves].”

Many of these white men appreciated their Asian wives for “possessing sexual purity, piety, submissiveness, and domesticity” (49). Additionally, Nemoto’s white male interviewees often compared Asian women to women of other races stating how these Asian women more desirable to white men than white and black women.

### *Asian Men’s Stereotypes*

Stereotypes about Asian women as feminine also apply to Asian men, but they are interpreted differently; similar to Asian women, Asian men are considered as feminine—which is not considered an attractive male trait. Although “Asian American men might be stereotyped as highly intelligent or as good wage earners, stereotypes have emasculated them, removing them from competition with white men” (Root 2001:11). Root explains how the overemphasis on Asian men’s feminine stereotypes over Asians’ “positive” stereotypes as intelligent and high-earning can make Asian men appear less attractive than not only white men but also men of other races. For example, Tsai’s interviewees stereotyped Asian males as “overly studious, socially inept, weak, cunning, hostile, and unemotional” (2002: 199). Root (2001) says Asian men’s petite physical features, compared to white and black men’s, perpetuate the Asian men’s feminine stereotype. These stereotypes of Asian men as feminine widen the gap between the number of Asian women dating white men and Asian men dating white women.

Where do these racialized gender stereotypes about Asian men originate from?

According to Tsai (2002), these stereotypes have their roots in early twentieth-century literature. Since WWII, Asian American male stereotypes have been communicated through the media. The false depictions of Asian males as asexual emerged when the stereotypes about Asian women as hypersexual started. Asian men, due to immigration policies such as the Chinese Exclusion Act that banned Asian women from immigrating, had to practice traditionally feminine occupations,

hence the Asian “laundry man” (Takaki 1993: 198). Moreover, many Asian men remained single due to the small number of Asian women in the United States. For example, there was “one woman for every twenty-five Japanese men” (Amott & Matthaei 1991: 219). A combination of these factors began the depiction of Asian American men as asexual.

Although there are numerous studies on stereotypes of Asian women and men and the origins of these stereotypes, these stereotypes have not been studied in the context of interracial relationships. In other words, do these stereotypes play a role in determining which race Asians choose to marry or date? Do Asian women and men accept these stereotypes constructed by the dominant society when choosing a partner, or do they reject these stereotypes?

### *Asian Women- White Men Relationships*

#### *White Men's Stereotypes*

Stereotypes are not limited to racial minorities; there are stereotypes of white men as hegemonic masculinities. Goffman (1963) provides a definition of hegemonic masculinities:

In an important sense there is only one unblushing male in America: a young, married, white, urban, northern, heterosexual, Protestant father of college education, fully employed, of good complexion, weight, and height, and a recent record in sports. Every American male tends to look out upon the world from this perspective... Any male who fails to qualify in any one of these ways is likely to view himself—during moments at least—as unworthy, incomplete, and inferior (128)

This hegemonic masculinity, created by American and European mass media portrayals, depicts White Americans as “heroic, attractive, loving, and egalitarian” (Kim 2008). Nemoto states Asian women are “vulnerable to hegemonic [w]hite images and discourses, and they internalize these influences and in turn aspire to be the ideal partners of [w]hite American men” (2009: 27). These stereotypes portray white men positively, causing Asian women to develop positive opinions of White men.

### *History of Asian Women-White Men Interracial Marriages*

Most literature on Asian women-white men relationships focuses on the historical origins of the stereotypes of Asian women who engage in relationships with white men (Espiritu 1997; Nemoto 2009; Wiegman 1991). Asian military brides in the 1950s began the trend of Asian women-white men marriages. The War Brides Act of 1945 allowed 150,000 Asian American military brides to enter into the United States despite the anti-miscegenation laws during the era (Nemoto 2009). Due to military brides' tendencies to be of low socioeconomic class and have low education level, they were often assumed to be related to military prostitution. Since then, Asian women in relationships with White men were and continue to be depicted as submissive, docile, and as having been rescued by military men (Nemoto 2009). Although both Asian women and white men in these relationships are stigmatized, Asian women who are romantically involved with white men are often criticized at a higher rate by Asian men.

### *Intra-Asian Relationships*

Dominant stereotypes about Asian men and women often create tensions between Asian men and women. Espiritu (1997) notes that the later generation of Asian American women and Asian American men often do not "think of each other in sexual terms" (97). In other words, Asian American women are not romantically attracted to Asian men because these women perceive Asian men as feminine.

Asian women, on the other hand, are criticized by Asian men for dating white men. Nemoto (2009) interviewed Asian men who criticized Asian women who were romantically involved with White men as "sell outs" and often referred to them as military brides. Pang (1998) gives an example of a Korean American man who expressed his disapproval:

I'm not sure why, but it doesn't look good to me. Yeah, I see quite a few couples like that where the woman is Asian and the guy is Caucasian. When I see something like that...



it's a feeling that is close to betrayal. It seems like that Asian person is betraying her own race. Feeling that's close to that (133).

Both Espiritu and Nemoto examine how these stereotypes created by the West harm relationships between Asian women and men. Consequently, they express concerns about what would happen to the rate of Asian American interracial marriage if these stereotypes continue to influence Asian women and men's marital choices.

Although there is some research on interracial intimacy, these have often focused on black-white married couples. Additionally, the focus of past research has been the demographics of those who engage in interracial marriage and their reasons for marrying interracially. Studies on Asian women have been limited to their stereotypes. Additionally, there have been few empirical studies of Asian American women's interracial relationships with whites to understand their experiences. The current research aims to learn how these stereotypes of Asian women influence Asian women's dating relationships with whites. In contrast to previous studies which have focused on interracial marriages, my research captures the "selection pool" from which marriage relationships emerge. In other words, my study considers interracial relationships which may or may not reach the marriage stage. As Yancey (2002) states, one cannot assume the experiences and characteristics of those who date to be similar to those who marry, but this fact in no way devalues interracial dating as an indicator of racial boundaries.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### *Racial Ideology*

Bonilla-Silva defines racial ideology as "the racially based frameworks used by actors to explain and justify (dominant race) or challenge (subordinate race or races) the racial status quo" (2006:9). Although people of all races can develop these frameworks, the ones developed by whites, the dominant race, are valued the most, in keeping with Marx's argument that the "ruling

*material* force of the society” is its “ruling *intellectual* force” (Bonilla-Silva 2006:9). Racial ideology often has three elements: common frames, style, and racial stories. Frames are defined as “set paths for interpreting information” (Bonilla-Silva 2006:26). The frames developed by the dominant race are often treated as common sense, and oppositional ideologies endeavor to confront these frames by using minority races’ stories. “The style of an ideology refers to its peculiar *linguistic manners and rhetorical strategies* (or *race talk*), to the technical tools that allow users to articulate its frames and story lines. Bonilla-Silva says racial stories are “fable-like” since they are often “impersonal, generic arguments with little narrative content—they are the ideological ‘of course’ racial narratives” (2006:76).

Color-blind racism, a new racial ideology, became evident in the 1960s as a covert racism to perpetuate the racial structure without overt statements. It is defined as the “racial ideology that glues the post-civil rights racial structure” (Bonilla-Silva et al. 2004: 560). Just like any other racial ideologies, color-blind racism has three elements: common frames, style, and racial stories. Not only conservative whites, but progressive whites and even blacks use color-blind racism. The theory of racial ideology is relevant in interpreting the way Asian women perceive people of other races. Because of Asian’s honorary white statuses, do they adhere to whites’ racially based frameworks or do they confront these frameworks along with other minorities? Lastly, did color-blind racism affect Asian women as well?

### *Racialized Gender Ideology*

The racialized gender ideology integrates race and gender. It accounts for why people of the same race have different stereotypes (or same stereotype but different implications such as Asians being feminine) depending on the gender of the stereotyped group. For example, it attempts to explain why Asian men and women are faced with different ideologies even though

they are of the same race. Racialized gender ideologies are socially constructed by the dominant group, the ones with hegemonic masculinity, which is “organized around the symbolic equation of masculinity and power. It is an ideal type that is glorified and associated with white men at the highest levels of society, although few actually possess the associated traits” (Pyke and Johnson 2003:33). Chen (1999) states that Asian men, racialized as feminine, achieve masculinity through “four possible gender strategies: compensation, deflection, denial, or repudiation” (584). These gender strategies will be used to guide my analysis of Asian women.

Similar to Asian men, the sexuality of Asian women has been constructed by dominant groups to “justify and bolster nationalist movements, colonialism, and/or racism” (Espiritu 2001: 416). Espiritu (1997) compares Asian women to hegemonic femininities:

As the racialized exotic “others,” Asian American women do not fit the white constructed notions of the feminine. Whereas white women have been depicted as chaste and dependable, Asian women have been represented as promiscuous and untrustworthy (94)

Researchers have studied Asian women based on these hegemonic femininities. For instance, Pyke and Johnson (2003) compares how Asian women construct femininities in both their ethnic and mainstream society, and finds Asian women glorifying white femininity and rejecting constructed Asian femininities. Espiritu (2001) has found Filipinas claiming power through gender that has been denied to them by racism by constructing views of white women as sexually impure and immoral. Pyke and Johnson (2003) and Espiritu (2001) have examined the role of racialized femininities of Asian women in their studies. I use the notion of racialized gender ideologies in framing my analysis of Asian women’s dating experiences with white men. Do they embrace the racialized femininities of Asian women as hyper-feminine, submissive, and quiet, or do they glorify and desire white femininity?

### *Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans*

Developed by Claire Kim, the theory of racial triangulation of Asian Americans occurs in two intertwined processes: “relative valorization” and “civic ostracism” (C. Kim 1999:3). To explain briefly, “relative valorization” occurs when whites “valorize” Asian Americans culturally and racially over blacks. The “civic ostracism” is when whites “construct [Asian Americans] as immutably foreign and unassimilable with [whites] on cultural and/or racial grounds in order to ostracize them from the body politic and civic membership” (see Figure 1) (C. Kim 1999:3). Claire Kim argues that racial triangulation has persisted since the mid-1900s to the present. In contemporary society, however, Asian Americans are racially triangulated covertly via color-blind racism. Numerous research studies have used the theory of racial triangulation; Tuan (1998) devotes her book, *Forever Foreigner or Honorary Whites?* to this paradox. She finds third generation Asians, compared to blacks, are considered superior, as they are often regarded as “honorary whites.” Even so, they are often faced with discrimination because they are “forever foreigners.” Like Tuan, I use the theory of racial triangulation to analyze the experiences of Asian women’s dating experiences with white men. Are these women considered “honorary whites” or “forever foreigners” by their white partners? How do they perceive themselves when compared to blacks and whites?

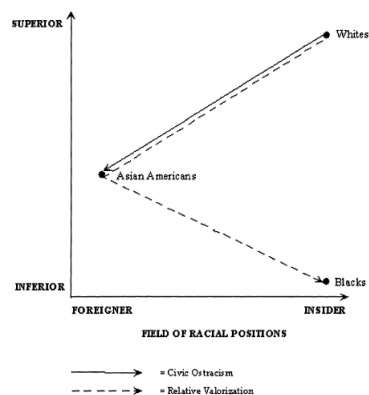


Figure 1. Racial Triangulation

### *Assimilation Theory*

Assimilation theory, originated in the Chicago school during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, argues that immigrants assimilate into the dominant culture of America. Warner and Srole (1945) extend the theory by noting the importance of skin color when determining one's likelihood of assimilating to the dominant culture. They concluded that Blacks would not be able to assimilate without "revolutionary changes in U.S. Society" (Parillo 2008). Milton Gordon developed the assimilation theory further and argued that assimilation is a multidimensional process wherein cultural and structural assimilations are the two most important dimensions. Cultural assimilation occurs when immigrants reject their ethnic cultures and accept the dominant culture. Structural assimilation on the other hand, is when immigrants integrate through befriending, living close by, and engaging in romantic relationships with the members of the dominant group (Gordon 1964).

Alba and Nee have adapted the assimilation theory to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. They define assimilation as "the decline of an ethnic distinction and its corollary cultural and social differences" (2003:11). In other words, assimilation does not mean the disappearance of all "ethnic markers" (Parillo 2008: 58). Alba and Nee (2003) also include that along with assimilation, "boundary blurring" will occur between the dominant group and the immigrant group. Parillo (2008) defines a social boundary as "an institutionalized social distinction by which individuals perceive their social world and divide others into categories that have the character of 'us' or 'them' (59). Alba (2009) states that Latinos and Asians, compared to Blacks, often gain social proximity through working and living near whites and engaging in romantic relationships with whites, which will eventually result in the assimilation of these racial groups.

Moon-Kie Jung (2009), Nadia Kim (2007), and other researchers have critiqued the assimilation theory. Moon-Kie Jung points out the assimilation theory's major flaw: "the

assimilation theories do not adequately account for race.” The fundamental aspects of race, inequality and domination, are neither similarity nor differences (synonyms and antonyms of assimilation). Nadia Kim (2007) attacks the assimilation theory by reevaluating often mistaken demographic data (e.g. socioeconomic statuses and intermarriage trends) on Asian Americans. Nadia Kim states that although Asians’ household incomes are higher than whites’ household incomes, Asians’ individual incomes are lower than white’s individual incomes. As for intermarriage trends, Kim presents data demonstrating the increasing rate of interethnic marriages and decreasing rate of Asian-white marriages. I use the notion of assimilation theory in framing my analysis of Asian women’s dating experiences with white men to critique the assimilation theory.

## METHODS

### *Sample*

My sample includes twenty Asian American women, ten international students, and two Asian-white biracial women (see Table 1). Researchers often differentiate immigrants by determining which generation American immigrants they are. This variable is inappropriate for my participants, as many were born in countries other than the ones in which they were raised, and some had parents who immigrated to many countries (i.e. travelling business persons). Thus, I find approximate years in America to be a more accurate measure. I differentiate Asian American and international students based on their legal statuses. I note Asians with American citizenships as “Asian American” and Asian women with F-1 visas as “international students.” In my findings section, international students are differentiated by the inclusion of “(I)” after their pseudonyms. Including international students is vital when studying Asians. Nadia Kim (2007) criticizes research studying only American born Asians by emphasizing the need to include

foreign-born Asians; “Asian Americans are a predominantly foreign-born populace (Lai and Arguelles 2003) and are also a group in which the first generation serves as leaders and elders” (566).

My interviewees were students at a private university in a metropolitan area, and their ages ranged from eighteen to twenty-five. Except the two biracial women, my participants were daughters of financially successful parents. Each interviewee reported living in an expensive, mostly white neighborhood and having at least one parent with a white-collar job. High socioeconomic status is one of “three major predicates of the thesis on Asian Americans’ racial mobility,” the other two being “high rates of intermarriage with whites” and “racial attitudes and ideology” (N. Kim 2007:570). Thus, when evaluating the assimilation theory, controlling for socioeconomic statuses reduces any differences that may arise from the effect of socioeconomic statuses on Asian women’s dating experiences with whites.

| Pseudonym                                  | Ethnicity    | Country of Birth | Years in America | Years Outside of U.S. | Dating History                         |
|--|--------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------------|--|
| <b>Asian American Women (n=20)</b>         |              |                  |                  |                       |  |
| Stephanie <sup>1</sup>                     | Korean       | USA              | 21               | 0                     | 1 white, 1 Korean                      |
| Caitlin <sup>1</sup>                       | Korean       | USA              | 21               | 0                     | 1 white, 2 Korean                      |
| Joyce <sup>2</sup>                         | Chinese      | China            | 17               | Asia=4                | 1 white                                |
| Taylor <sup>2</sup>                        | Chinese      | USA              | 19               | 0                     | 2 white                                |
| Mallory                                    | Chinese      | USA              | 18               | 0                     | 2 white, 1 Filipino                    |
| Melissa <sup>2</sup>                       | Chinese      | USA              | 19               | 0                     | 1 white                                |
| Helen <sup>1</sup>                         | Korean       | USA              | 21               | 0                     | 1 white, 2 Korean                      |
| Mandy                                      | Japanese     | Japan            | 21               | Asia=1                | 3 white                                |
| Brianna <sup>2</sup>                       | Chinese      | China            | 15               | Asia=4                | 1 white                                |
| Sophia <sup>1</sup>                        | Chinese      | USA              | 18               | 0                     | 1 white, 1 Chinese                     |
| Jennifer <sup>2</sup>                      | Taiwanese    | USA              | 20               | 0                     | 1 white                                |
| Emily                                      | Korean       | USA              | 20               | 0                     | 2 Hispanic, 3 white                    |
| Claudia <sup>2</sup>                       | Chinese      | USA              | 21               | 0                     | 1 white                                |
| Danielle <sup>2</sup>                      | Korean       | USA              | 21               | 0                     | 2 white                                |
| Janice                                     | Chinese      | USA              | 21               | 0                     | 3 white                                |
| Cathy <sup>2</sup>                         | Chinese      | USA              | 20               | Asia=1                | 2 white, 1 white European              |
| Megan                                      | Chinese      | China            | 12               | Asia=8                | 2 white                                |
| Veronica <sup>2</sup>                      | Chinese      | China            | 21               | 0                     | 1 white                                |
| Liz <sup>2</sup>                           | Korean       | USA              | 12               | Asia=10               | 1 Korean, 1 European American, 2 white |
| Julie <sup>2</sup>                         | Chinese      | USA              | 20               | 0                     | 2 white                                |
| <b>Asian International Students (n=10)</b> |              |                  |                  |                       |  |
| Hannah <sup>1</sup>                        | Korean       | Malaysia         | 6                | Asia=6, Europe=4      | 1 white, 1 Korean                      |
| Jade <sup>2</sup>                          | Taiwanese    | Taiwan           | 7                | Australia=1           | 1 white                                |
| Sarah <sup>1</sup>                         | Korean       | Korea            | 7                | Asia=15               | 2 white, 1 Hispanic, 1 Korean          |
| Nathalie                                   | Chinese      | China            | 0.5              | Asia=22               | 2 Chinese, 1 white                     |
| Isabel                                     | Chinese      | China            | 1                | Asia=18               | 1 Chinese, 1 white                     |
| Joanne <sup>2</sup>                        | Chinese      | China            | 3.5              | Asia=21               | 1 Chinese, 1 white                     |
| Susan <sup>2</sup>                         | Chinese      | Malaysia         | 2                | Asia=17               | 1 white                                |
| Rachel                                     | Chinese      | China            | 2                | Asia=17               | 1 white, 3 Chinese                     |
| Heather                                    | Korean       | Korean           | 5                | Asia=12 Europe=2      | 2 white, 1 Korean                      |
| Samantha                                   | Chinese      | China            | 4                | Asia=16               | 1 white, 1 Chinese                     |
| <b>Asian-White Women (n=2)</b>             |              |                  |                  |                       |  |
| Allison                                    | Korean-white | Japan            | 19               | None                  | 4 white                                |
| Emma <sup>1</sup>                          | Korean-white | America          | 14               | 6                     | 1 white, 1 Vietnamese                  |

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<sup>1</sup> Currently dating an Asian man

<sup>2</sup> Currently dating a white man



### *Why Asian Women?*

The most vital reason for my choice to study Asian women-white men relationships by interviewing Asian women instead of white men was my status as an Asian woman who has been dating a white man. I expected Asian women would be more comfortable conversing with an Asian woman than with a member of another race or gender. Feeling comfortable with an interviewer can create a better repertoire between the interviewer and interviewee, thereby creating more reliable data (Weiss 1994). My being a heterosexual female interviewing heterosexual females eased some tension that may arise between different sexes in private interview locations, especially when conversing about romantic relationships (Weiss 1994). I feel that because I am a heterosexual female, my participants felt more at ease inviting me to their dorm rooms for interviews, sometimes even discussing sex-related topics about white men. Although no one explicitly stated so, I believe that my being of the same race as my interviewees helped them feel comfortable sharing about their parents' prejudice towards other races. Lastly, my dating experience with a white man aided me in constructing appropriate research questions for understanding interracial dating experiences. When I concluded by asking my participants if they had anything else to share about their dating experiences, many stated that I covered all topics and asked how I "came up with really good questions." To protect the study from any potential biases, I did not inform my participants about my dating a white man until the interview had concluded.

### *Recruitment*

Twenty Asian American women, ten female international students, and two Asian-white women were recruited for the study using availability sampling. To recruit my interviewees, I posted fliers around dormitories, libraries, and classroom buildings (see Appendix A). I also posted recruitment messages to Internet sites for Asian clubs and sororities. Two of the women

were my prior acquaintances, but they contacted me after seeing fliers attached to various buildings. Asian women who were interested in participating e-mailed me, and I verified that they each had these characteristics: (1) age 18 or older (2) an East or Southeast Asian or of East or Southeast Asian descent (3) currently dating or had dated a white American man (non-Hispanic) (4) an undergraduate or a graduate student (5) a daughter of Asian parents (not adopted by parents of other races). This study was funded by the Scholarly Inquiry and Research at Emory program which provided funding to pay each of thirty women ten dollars as incentive. The other two women (Asian-white women) were also paid ten dollars, provided by me.

Initially, I did not plan to recruit Asian-white women. Two Asian-white women, however, contacted me wanting to participate. Curious about how their dating experiences with white men differed from Asian women's experiences, I chose to interview them. Although data from two Asian-white women are insufficient to explain the experiences of the Asian-white women population who date white men, data received from these interviews helped me to solidify my findings. Both Asian-white women had Korean mothers and white American fathers who were American soldiers stationed in Korea.

#### *Mode of Administration: Interview*

I conducted one hour, semi-structured, open-ended, and face-to-face, interviews for all my participants. Although I had an interview script, I improvised new questions when appropriate (see Appendix B). When first designing the study, I planned to conduct the interview in a private setting or a semi-public setting (i.e. coffee shops). After the first interview at a coffee shop, I realized how distracting the presence of others could be and decided to limit my interview locations to only private locations. Private locations where interviews were held included interviewee's dorm rooms, study rooms in the university library, and meeting rooms in various buildings of the college. My interviewees and I were the only persons in the rooms while

the interviews were conducted, and we ensured that others could not overhear our conversations. All the interviews were recorded with participants' consent (see Appendix C).

### *Transcribing, Coding, and Analyzing*

All the interviews were transcribed within five months of the date of the interview. I used word-for-word transcribing, and noted pauses and laughs. I assigned pseudonyms to interviewees, their partners, and acquaintances (if their names were mentioned). First, I used line-by-line coding to prevent my experiences from biasing my coding and analysis since many women held different perspectives from mine on Asian women-white men dating relationships. In-vivo coding was useful when capturing specific words or sentences that portrayed Asian women's experiences well. I used MAXQDA to line-by-line and in-vivo code. I then coded thematically by hand. I made sure to take line-by-line and in-vivo coding into account before labeling sentences to different themes. Compared to line-by-line coding, thematic coding helped me to analyze each interview as a whole. In other words, it helped me to review the interviewees' responses holistically. In many ways, this holistic view was vital to my analysis since Asian women expressed their change in perspectives of interracial dating over time. After thematic coding by hand, I used MAXQDA to digitalize my thematic coding. The thematic code list consisted of five code categories and numerous sub-codes and individual codes. These five code categories include: racial ideology, gender ideology, Asian parents, White parents, and Asian-white couples.

## FINDINGS

My findings are divided into three sections: "I Am (Honorary) White;" "No, You Are Asian;" and "Feeling Stuck." In the first section, I demonstrate Asian women portraying themselves as honorary whites, distancing themselves from negative stereotypes of Asians but

embracing “positive” stereotypes (e.g.: hyperfemininity). The second section discusses Asian women discovering racial boundaries through their dating relationships with whites. My interviewees’ white boyfriends and these men’s parents emphasized my interviewee’s “non-white” characteristics by focusing on “smart foreigner” stereotypes and minute cultural differences. After realizing their outsider status from whites, some Asian women tried to find a niche by turning to Asian friends and family. Unfortunately, the Asian community also treated these women as outsiders, assigning them special statuses because of their dating experiences with whites. Therefore, Asian women often reported feeling “stuck”—outsiders to both white and Asian communities. This phenomenon is explored in the last section, “Feeling Stuck.”

### *I Am (Honorary) White*

My interviewees made numerous points which suggest they perceive themselves as white. For instance, my interviewees said their white friends perceived them as white, and that they felt more comfortable associating with whites than with Asians. Many described themselves with the terms “white-washed” and “Twinkie” (their outer appearance is yellow, meaning Asian, but they are white inside), or said they tended to forget they were Asian until they see themselves in the mirror. One Asian American woman even stated that she “should have been born white.” In addition, many classified themselves as more American than Asian. Though this comparison seems more national/regional than racial, it is important to note that, as many earlier researchers have argued, for Asians, the term “American” indirectly implies “white” (Chou & Feagin 2008; Espiritu 2001; N. Kim 2008). In this section, “I Am (Honorary) White,” I explore how my interviewees perceive themselves as honorary whites. In the first sub-section, “I Date White Men,” I discuss how, although many already identified themselves as whites, dating white men was the ultimate opportunity to prove they were white. In the second sub-section, “Asian Dating

Customs Make Me Feel Fake,” I explore how Asian women distance themselves from Asian dating customs by stating that they feel disingenuous when they engage in these customs. In the third sub-section, “I Am Open-Minded,” I demonstrate how Asian women identify themselves closely with whites’ apparent racial progressiveness and distance themselves from Asians, who they perceive as racists. The last sub-section, “But I Will Be Asian If It Makes Me a Nicer Girlfriend,” is unique compared to other sub-sections. The first three sub-sections demonstrated three proofs Asian women often used to demonstrate their honorary white statuses. The last section shows Asian women embracing Asian characteristics; however, I include it in the “I Am (Honorary) White” section because these women embrace only “positive” stereotypes of Asian women, and only when doing so is convenient for them. They otherwise strongly identify themselves as white.

#### *I Date White Men*

My interviewees reported their dating white men as evidence they were Americanized, honorary white, or able to blend into both Asian and American cultures. When I asked Sophia how she responded when she received negative comments from others for dating white men, she said, “I grew up in America. Why can’t I date a white guy? We have the same mindset. Why can’t I?” Most of my Asian American interviewees stated that more “Americanized” or “white-washed” Asian women date white men. For instance, this is Melissa’s descriptions of Asian women who date white men:

“They would be more Americanized. They would be more like me—who basically spent my whole life around [whites]. I’ve never spent any time around Asian guys. That’s not the kind of people I am used to.”

In other words, my American born interviewees perceived their dating white men as confirmation that they were in fact honorary white. For instance, Julie stated she was “too Caucasian to date an Asian person.” Liz stated that her friends assumed that she would date

white men. She stated, “A lot of [my Asian male friends] knew that I was really American and open to race and American society. First, they were surprised, but then they were like, ‘I knew you were going to date a white guy.’” This quote demonstrates that not only Liz, but also her Asian male friends believe that Asian women who are “really American and open to race and American society” are a likely fit for white men. Additionally, many Asian American interviewees agreed with Brianna’s perception that “international people could definitely not date white men because [one] has to be pretty cued into the American culture to be able to date a white guy.” By stating who cannot date white men, Brianna is distancing herself from “international people” and people who are not “cued into the American culture,” implying she considers herself “cued into the American culture.” Many women already identified themselves as white before they started dating white men but saw their interracial relationships as confirmation that they were honorary white.

Asian international students, however, disagreed with Brianna’s statement that “international people could definitely not date white men.” International students stated that Asian women who date white men are often American born. They added, however, Asian international students who are “outgoing,” “not serious,” and “social” are also able to date white men. It is important to note that these are all characteristics they associated with whiteness. This is how Heather, an international student, perceived Asian women who date or have dated white men: “Umm, [they are] outgoing people. Umm, kind of not serious. Because white guys are not serious [about relationships].... They are more casual.” Nathalie, an international student gave a similar assessment about Asian women who date white men:

[They are] outgoing and fun. It’s very important to be fun. Because [in the] United States, it’s not just physical attractiveness. In China, it’s more about attractiveness. [In the United States], you talk, you have interesting ideas, [and] you are passionate about something.

Nathalie compares the definitions of attractiveness in two different cultures: the United States and China. According to Nathalie, women who are “outgoing and fun” and “are passionate” are considered attractive in the United States. She stated later “outgoing and fun,” “passionate and talkative” were among her *real* characteristics. She stated that she has to *act* in China when she goes on dates because women are expected to be quiet and only smile when men talk.

However, not all women who dated white men characterized their dating white men as a proof of their honorary white status. Isabel, an international student, came to America to attend college and became romantically involved with one of her classmates in an art class. When I questioned her about her boyfriend’s attractive traits, she answered, “I think he’s different from most American guys. He’s closer to the eastern character, like [the] Chinese personality, meaning he’s more introverted than extroverted and quiet.” She stated numerous times during her interview that they were able to date because he was an “atypical” American with a “Chinese personality that’s more introverted than extroverted.” She stated that unlike “stereotypical American guys” who she finds “too noisy,” her boyfriend was “very shy and quiet.” Unlike other women who perceived their dating white men was due to the women being Americanized or white enough to date white men, Isabel perceived her relationship almost oppositely—she and her ex-boyfriend were able to date because of his “Chinese personality.”

Isabel’s perception contrasts with Pyke and Johnson (2003)’s findings. They found, while their Asian interviewees “construct a world in which Asian American women can experience a kind of transracial gender identity, they do not consider the same possibility for women of other races. A white woman who is submissive does not become Asian” (50). Isabel, even though she does not label her white boyfriend as “Asian” per se, states that she characterizes him as a man with “Chinese personality,” similar to the way many Asian women characterize themselves as

white due to their white stereotypical characteristics: outgoing, social, and talkative. In other words, Isabel may not directly describe her white boyfriend as “Asian,” but she does at least “construct a world in which [her white boyfriend] can experience a kind of transracial gender identity” (Pyke and Johnson 2003:50). Pyke and Johnson (2003) state that Asians who have non-Asian characteristics are often categorized as “white-washed” or acting white, but this rarely happens to white people who do not engage in stereotypical white behaviors. Isabel, however, linked her boyfriend’s characteristics that are “atypical for white people” to stereotypical Chinese characteristics. In both scenarios, my interviewees believed their interracial relationships were facilitated by one party’s assimilation to the other’s culture; in almost all cases, it was the Asian woman who assimilated.

*Asian Dating Customs Make Me Feel Fake!*

Because many of my international Asian students had not resided in the United States for more than three years, I hypothesized that they would feel more comfortable with the dating customs of their own countries. One of my Asian international students, however, shared the view that Asian gendered behavior is somewhat unnatural. Nathalie, an international student who came to the United States when she was twenty-two and had been in the United States for less than one year at the time of the interview, preferred American dating traditions over Chinese dating customs.

As mentioned in the previous sub-section, “I Date White Man,” Nathalie described having to hide her outgoing and talkative self and pretend that she is quiet when she goes on dates with Chinese men. When I asked her which dating customs she preferred, Chinese or American, she stated: “[I prefer American dating custom. It’s] more relaxed and you don’t have to be *fake*. You don’t have to *disguise* yourself (emphasis added).” She also mentioned favoring



the American way of planning dates—she preferred the experience she had with her white boyfriend of going on dates spontaneously instead of planning ahead of time. Many international students described feeling more equal in relationships with white partners than Asian men because white men often allowed women to pay for their own meals. Some said they felt “obligated” in relationships if their partners paid for all the dating expenses and stated that women and men splitting the dating expense made relationships more egalitarian and fair. Although international students who preferred splitting dating expenses did not say Asian customs made them feel fake, these women do seem to have an underlying mentality that “white ways are the ‘correct’ ways” (Chou and Feagin 2008: 153). Pyke and Johnson (2003) have explored tendency among Asian women to distance themselves from stereotypical Asian behaviors. They conducted a study of Asian Americans and Asians who, with one exception, immigrated to the United States prior to the age of sixteen. They concluded that “gendered behavior engaged in Asian ethnic settings was largely described as performative, fake and unnatural, while that in white-dominated settings was cast as a reflection of one’s true self” (43). As shown above, I found similar experiences with my interviewees who were international students. Thus, my data extend Pyke and Johnson’s findings—my interviewees who had lived in America for much shorter time periods than Pyke and Johnson’s interviewees also believed that “gender relations among whites are constructed as more egalitarian” (2003: 43).

Among my Asian American interviewees, most thought Asian values were unnatural, wrong, and pretentious. One particular example aptly shows a combination of the interviewee’s effort to distance herself from Asian values, her “white is right” mentality, and her belief that white gender relations are more egalitarian than Asian gender relations. Veronica says:

I feel like [there is] a lot less pressure [when dating a white man]. Because I feel like being raised by like a Chinese family and dating a Chinese guy [who] was brought up

with the same amount of pressure as me to value things like academics and like things like oh you know like watch your weight, watch what you're eating, you know. It's like very like very stereotypically Asian, like [these] principles. And like I've dated Korean guys before, and I feel like the Korean culture has more of a stress on the male superiority and female inferiority, so it was just nice being on an equal level and being like "Yeah. We're like equal. I can fight back," and even like [in the] Chinese culture, male's the dominant one and female's supposed to be subservient. *I'm not that kind of person, so like I obviously don't like that very much.* (emphasis added)

As demonstrated in this excerpt, Veronica constructs herself as a feminist, valuing the more egalitarian, white gender relations, than Asian gender relations. In this sub-section, I have discussed how Asian women distance themselves from Asians by stating they feel fake and unnatural when they follow Asian dating customs and that they had to disguise their true selves. Many had the "white is right" mentality and the perception that white gender relations are egalitarian compared to Asian cultural values that allocate dominance to men. My data on interviewees identifying themselves as honorary whites and desiring a white identity contradict data reviewed by Nadia Kim (2007) which find "Asian Americans across generations do not desire to blend in with whiteness or unhyphenated Americanness" (567). As shown in this section, not only did my interviewees desire white identities, but they also rejected the Asian customs and way of thinking. In the next sub-section, I will explore how Asian women distance themselves from Asians by claiming they are not only more gender egalitarian but also more racially progressive.

#### *"I Am Open-Minded"*

In this section, I aim to discuss my interviewees' claims of being open-minded. To these women, being open-minded meant they were unlike other Asians. My interviewees often spoke negatively of Asians for only hanging out with other Asians and of their own parents for being biased against other races. In other words, my respondents distanced themselves from other Asians by claiming that they were "open-minded." To my respondents, their being "open-minded"

meant their mindsets were similar to whites', as these Asian women perceived whites as more "open-minded." As discussed in an earlier section, "Asian Dating Customs Make Me Feel Fake!" whites were seen as more progressive than Asians on issues such as gender egalitarianism. Similarly, my respondents perceived whites as more racially progressive than Asians and wanted to identify with whites' racially progressive attitudes. Prior research partly confirms this generalization. Bonilla-Silva (2010) presents a table on Asians' racial attitudes which shows that, compared to whites, Asians had worse conceptions of blacks and Latinos.

To provide some examples, throughout the interviews, many stated: I'm in the "rainbow crowd at the dinner" (Taylor), "I view everyone the same. I don't see race or the color." (Nathalie, International), "I am open-minded" (Mallory), and "I don't support racism at all" (Emily). When talking about their parents and others they classified as Asian, they made comments such as: "I feel like Koreans are racists in the fact that like they all talk to each other about whomever in their language" (Danielle); "My parents are very racist toward everyone and anyone especially among Asian community" (Megan); and "I think a lot of Asians are very racist" (Taylor). When talking about their friends, however, they stated that their white friends do not seclude themselves, as Asians tend to do. Additionally, my interviewees stated that race is never an issue with their white friends since my interviewees and their friends are open-minded and "cool about it."

Ironically, many of my interviewees who claimed to be "open-minded" held race and gender biases. Similar to the way whites and blacks used color-blind racism frameworks, many of my interviewees used them to avoid sounding overtly racist (Bonilla-Silva 2003). Among various color-blind racism frameworks they used, I discuss ones relevant to Asian-white interracial relationships.

*But white women don't want to date Asian men.* In this section, I demonstrate my interviewees' use of a color-blind racism strategy, "I date white men because I am open-minded, but white women don't want to date Asian men." This explanation is in many ways logically faulty. First, if my interviewees were truly open-minded, why would most specifically prefer to date white men over men of other races? Second, it contradicts my interviewees' statements claiming whites were open-minded. If white women were truly open-minded, these women should not hold any negative feelings toward Asian men as a group.

Additionally, when I asked my interviewees to explain why there were roughly twice as many Asian women dating white men as Asian men dating white women, my interviewees often chose to discuss the low rate of Asian men-white women relationships rather than why Asian women chose white men over Asian men. Note the following excerpt:

Taylor: Back to the hierarchy. White women are more independent and they like doing things for themselves and most of the times Asian men don't like the idea of not being able to control someone. Well, in general at least.

Interviewer: So do you think that's why white women don't want to date Asian men?

Taylor: I think white women like the rugged type.

Taylor uses both Asian men and white women's stereotypes to explain why there is a small proportion of Asian men dating white women. Instead of overtly criticizing Asian men's hyperdomineering and "[not] rugged" characteristics, Taylor imposes intermediaries, white women, to criticize Asian men. Taylor stated earlier during the interview that Asian men are "pretty to look at" but not "attractive" in a romantic sense. Megan made similar statements about Asian men. She stated, "I mean they are nice guys, but they are like brothers to me." It is clear that, like Taylor, Megan has no romantic feelings toward Asian men. This phenomenon is common; many researchers have found Asian women, especially Asian American women stating

that they are not sexually attracted to Asian men (Fung 1994 & Espiritu 1997). Taylor also described Asian men as wanting dominance over women. Taylor talked about Asian male students in her school who were controlling of their girl friends. Thus, Taylor views Asian men negatively but uses white women as intermediaries when asked to justify why Asian women, including herself, choose to date white men over Asian men.

Many of my interviewees who came to America for college as international students used similar frameworks to explain why there were more Asian women-white men relationships than Asian men-white women relationships. Rachel (I) uses the stereotypes that Asians are more conservative and feminine than whites to justify this disparity:

Because Asians are more conservative than whites. And that's good for girls but not for men. [For] us Asian girl[s], [it] is good to be conservative, but Asian guys should be more manly like white guys. That's why white men want Asian girls because they have this character which is I think [is] perfect for women. They won't drink wine at maybe 4AM at a bar. They are more lady-like. Asian boys also have these characters so it's not good for them. [So] white women don't want Asian men.

Unlike Taylor, who only explains by talking about Asian men and white women, Rachel (I) also incorporates Asian women and white men in her explanation. Her message delivers many ideas: Asian women, compared to Asian men, make better partners for whites. She implies Asian men are not as “manly” as whites; Asian men are seen as “lady-like.” White men desire lady-like women, which is why white men desire Asian women. White women desire “manly” men, which is why white women are not attracted to Asian men. In this quote, Rachel (I) stereotypes not only other races and another gender, but also her own: Asian woman. As demonstrated in the “But I’ll be Asian If It Makes Me a Nicer Girlfriend” section, Rachel (I) identifies as Asian when this identification benefits her. Instead of challenging the stereotypes portraying Asian women as more feminine and “lady-like,” she uses them as an explanation as to why Asian women can attract white men when Asian men cannot attract white women. Once again, similar to Taylor,

Rachel (I) does not explicitly state she and other Asian women do not want to date Asian men when trying to explain the disparity. Instead, they both state, “White women don’t want to date Asian men.”

***But Black men aren’t an option for me.*** This was a common color-blind strategy among my interviewees: (1) stating that they were open-minded (2) stating that their parents were more lenient toward interracial dating than toward interracial marriage (3) when asked if their parents would agree to their dating black men, they gave explanations for why their parents would not want them to date black men (4) when asked if they agree with their parents, most said they did.

Similar to my other interviewees, Megan stated several times during her interview that she and her parents were open-minded to her dating other races. To clarify, I asked her if she would be “open to dating other races such as Hispanics and blacks.” She replied:

Nobody in my family is gonna date black men. I’m sorry. I love black people. I’m working on that. I have really good African American friends. Don’t get me wrong. But I feel like I’m not ready for an African American. Which is sad. It’s just their culture. And being half black, any kind of half black, black men are like hitting on you 24-7. Not that black men don’t hit on Asian girls 24-7 but any kind of half black. There’s a drop of black in you and a black guy can spot it or he can smell it, he’s going to harp on you. Like hit on you. I’m not comfortable with that. They are, not all of them. Because I’ve met a lot of very honorable, a lot of very respectable [black men], but I feel like there’s more in the average number of black guys that aren’t as respectful. That aren’t as respecting of women. African American is cool but in my family, I’m not sure. It’s just me being racist. I’m sorry. My parents have never really liked black people. My experiences with black people growing up, I mean not all black people are the same. That’s a hasty generalization. But given my experiences, I wouldn’t say I’m scared, but I would say that I’m still not 100% comfortable because they gave me a lot of crap when I was growing up. And I’m just not comfortable with it. It’s kind of like Jewish Holocaust thing. Jews maybe don’t like whatever whatever whatever. Maybe Chinese and Koreans still hate Japanese for all the crap that happened. I feel like it’s like that with me.

Megan explicitly states that she is racist. Her tone, the way she says “I’m sorry” and her taking time to explain why she is “racist” towards blacks indicate that she thinks it is reasonable for her

to be racist toward blacks. Not only does Megan use stereotypical images of black men being hypersexual to explain why she does not want anyone in her family to date black men, but she also uses stories (her families' negative views of blacks, how blacks "gave[her] a lot of crap when [she] was growing up") to justify her way of thinking. As Bonilla-Silva (2003) argues, using personal stories such as Megan's are one of the ways color-blind racism unfolds.

Additionally, she uses numerous "discursive buffers before or after [she] states something that is or could be interpreted as racist" (Bonilla-Silva 2003:57). For example, Megan starts her explanation by stating, "I love black people." She says, "I'm sorry" numerous times and says she knows she is making generalizations by including that she understands that there are "honorable and respectable black men" as well.

Another common racial framework my interviewees used to explain why they did not want to date black or Hispanic men was "my parents are racist." When I asked them directly "Do you agree with them?" most stated that they agreed with their parents. Heather, an international student who has been studying in America for about five years shared her parents' view on racial preference for their daughter's partner:

Heather (I): Dating, they don't really care. [*Interviewer: Even a black guy?*] Umm...My dad would say, "No" if I dated a black guy. Because a lot of Koreans think that they are hypersexual. I think my mom would say, "Are you sure you want to date him? You're going to get black too." [*Interviewer: What do you mean by that?*] A lot of Korean people say that black people's skin's darkness travels to your skin. I hear that all the time. [*Interviewer: What does that mean?*]. People say that black people's skin, it's not that the skin is just plain dark but there's something else to it. That something dark is stuck to their skin. So it can travel slowly to another people's skin if you spend time with them. One of my friends, this Chinese girl, shared the dorm [with a black girl], and [the Chinese girl's skin] really did get darker. She didn't get as dark as black people but [dark] as if she's tanned. She was very white, pale person, but she got darker and darker slowly. Yeah. She never got tanned or anything. She didn't go to tanning beds or go under sun or something like that. It was winter and she got darker and darker.

Interviewer: Then what about white people who are married to black people?

Heather (I): [long pause from the respondent; she changes the subject] In addition, my parents don't like the black people's smell.

Interviewer: Where do you think it's coming from?

Heather (I): Their hair spray.

Interviewer: Women? [*Respondent: Yes*] But you are not going to date women<sup>3</sup>

Heather (I): For the guy, I think it's more about their armpit smell. [laughs] [*Interviewer: What do you think about your parents thinking this way about blacks?*] I agree with them.

She agrees with “a lot of other Korean people” and her parents’ stereotypical images of blacks. Nevertheless, she frames her story by what others believe or say instead of stating explicitly that these are also her thoughts about blacks. Her claim that “a lot of” Koreans believe that “black people’s skin’s darkness travels to your skin” could be very threatening to Koreans given Koreans strive in many ways to make their skin as pale as possible (N. Kim 2008). Although this strivings for pale skin is not limited to women, women spend large amounts of money and effort to apply sun block lotions and wear garments to prevent their skin from tanning. Nadia Kim (2008) shares two Japanese proverbs that demonstrate the value of white skin: “A white [skin] compensates for many deficiencies” and “In rice and women, the whiter the better” (28). Along with the idea that black men are hypersexual, the claim that “spending time with blacks can make your skin darker” casts blacks in a very negative light for Koreans.

Much as many of Bonilla-Silva’s subjects used testimonies to support their color-blind racism, Heather (I) uses a testimony: how her Chinese friend once had pale skin but it became darker because of her rooming with a black female. Additionally, she says her parents and many other Koreans are racist, which Bonilla-Silva labels as “stories of disclosure of knowledge of

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<sup>3</sup> All my interviewees were heterosexual



someone who is racist” (2003: 92). As shown above, when I asked her if she agreed with her parents, she said she did. Most of my interviewees disclosed that their parents were racist and thus were against them dating blacks (except for Mandy). When I asked them if they agreed with their parents’ opinions, unlike Bonilla-Silva’s interviewees who distanced themselves from these “racist individuals,” most of my interviewees stated that they agreed with their parents’ views.

*But “biracial kids are cute.”* My original interview script did not include questions about biracial children. Noticing, though, that my first ten interviewees often mentioned biracial children voluntarily when discussing their reasons for pursuing relationships with white men and when describing their parents’ and peers’ responses to their dating, I began asking questions about biracial children in subsequent interviews when appropriate (e.g. You said your friends didn’t say much about your dating white men. Did they say anything about biracial children?)

I discuss the topic of biracial children in this section, “I am Open-Minded,” because to someone who fit the definition of “open-mindedness” described at the beginning of this section, Asian-white children should not be particularly “cute[r]” than or preferable to children of other races. In other words, these “praises” are stereotyping biracial children. Additionally, as Claudia states, “[others] would probably not say anything about our future kids if I were dating an Asian guy.” Making comments about potential children from these relationships predicated solely on the races of the would-be parents reduces couples to their genetic value. An analogy could be even drawn to sketching the child’s pedigree. It treats their relationships strictly as combinations of two races, not as relationships between individuals. None of my interviewees planned or were planning to have children with their past or current white partners, and they presumably did not tell their parents or friends otherwise. Additionally, none but Julie wanted to marry their past or

current partners. Then why are their peers and parents complementing the looks of their potential children?

Similar to the Oriental femininity myth my interviewees accepted as praises, they proudly accepted these racist praises about biracial children and interpreted them as signs of acceptance from others. For example, Janice stated, “My mom would sometimes say that people would judge your kids if they are biracial. But usually people would say things like ‘multiracial kids are really, really beautiful.’” Earlier, Janice stated that one of the reasons her parents discouraged her from marrying white men was Janice’s parents’ concern over the possible discrimination their half-white grandchildren may face from society. From the above quote, it is clear Janice doubts her mother’s claim about this discrimination towards biracial children. She implies, rather than being judged negatively, biracial children are aesthetically accepted by others. This quote demonstrates her acceptance of others’ “praises” regardless of her mother’s concern.

Janice was not alone. More than half of my interviewees who discussed the topic of biracial children took the matter a step further and claimed biracial children were the “best of both worlds.” Mallory and Nathalie (I) explained this term. Mallory was the only Asian woman whose mother preferred for her daughter to marry a white man over an Asian man. Mallory interpreted this as a “strange” preference but agreed with her mother at some level. Mallory describes her mother’s perceptions of Asian-white children:

[My mother] thinks [Asian-white children] are better looking and smarter. I don’t know... [I think she means] genetically [laugh]. I don’t know. That sounds really bad. [My mom] thinks it’s like the best from both world.

Returning to the issue of color-blind racism, Mallory uses two common trends of color-blind racism: using buffers such as “I don’t know” and “That sounds really bad” and sharing “stories of disclosure of knowledge of someone (her mother) who is racist” (Bonilla-Silva 2003: 92).

From the content of the quote, we learn that the claim that these children are the “best of both worlds” is derived from the stereotypes of Asians as smart and whites as better looking. Nathalie, an international student, focuses solely on the aesthetic of Asian-white children when explaining the term, “best of both worlds:” “Blending facial features [makes them cute]. You have facial feature[s] of white and other hairless features of Asians.” Once again, similar to Mallory’s quote, Nathalie uses stereotypes of Asians as hairless and white as having ideal facial features, to classify Asian-white children as “cute.”

From these quotes, we learn that “praises” of Asian-white children are far from being “open-minded.” In fact, they are racist for three main reasons: First, Asian-white children are valued over children of other races, which is racist in itself. Second, to make matters worse, they are valued based on two “positive” stereotypes about Asians (e.g. hairless and smart) and whites (e.g. attractive). Third, this stereotype analyzes the partners in Asian-white relationships merely according to their races. The prejudicial assumption underlying these comments is made more obvious by the fact that none of the Asian women were planning or hoping to reproduce with their white partners.

Lastly, I want to point out the irony of “open-minded” people who praise Asian-white couples because of the supposition of future biracial children. As seen in Janice’s quote, and as many of my interviewees pointed out, they believed that their friends were supporting their interracial relationships because of these positive comments about biracial children. The irony is that those who “praise” these Asian-white couples without thinking beyond the surface, think that their praising is a way of demonstrating support, showing they are “open-minded” about these interracial relationships. They do not realize, however, the racism engraved in these

“innocent” praises. In other words, the racism against Asian-white couples is encapsulated in a socially-acceptable framework, “you guys will have cute kids!”

There are numerous research studies on biracial children’s identities, but there is very little research on why people frequently praise Asian-white children as cute. Tuan (1998) states that because minorities “gradually absorb the dominant group’s standards of beauty,” having children with more “Caucasian influenced features” can only make the children more attractive in minorities’ eyes (60). This logic clarifies why Asians may perceive Asian-white children as attractive. Following this logic, though mono-racial Asians should be perceived as least attractive, mono-racial whites as most attractive, and Asian-white children as being in the middle of the attractiveness scale. Some of my interviewees, however, stated Asian-white children were more attractive than mono-racial white children. Additionally, the explanation Tuan (1998) suggests fails to explain why an overwhelming number of my interviewees’ white friends stated Asian-white children would be attractive.

In the section, “I am Open-Minded,” I discussed the inconsistencies of my interviewee’s claims to open-mindedness and racial neutrality. Although they may not be practicing an overt form of racism, they are engaging in a form of color-blind racism. As Bonilla-Silva discusses how whites and blacks use color-blind racism in his book, *Racism without Racists*, I demonstrate that Asians, too, engage in the usage of color-blind racism. The three strategies of color-blind racisms Asian women engaged in that I found relevant to their dating white men are: (1) blaming white women for not wanting to date Asian men instead of admitting that they (Asian women) do not find Asian men romantically attractive (2) using their parents' racist attitudes as an excuse to explain why they do not want to date black men (3) proudly accepting that biracial children are the “best of both worlds” without realizing the underlying racism in this characterization. By

using color-blind racism and blindly accepting others' color-blind racism, my interviewees perceived others as accepting their interracial relationships. They also assumed race would not be an issue while dating white men both because my respondents identified as white and because others, especially whites, were seen as "open-minded," thus, accepting of interracial relationships. As their relationships progressed, however, they began to question this assumption.

*But I'll Be Asian If It Makes Me a Nicer Girlfriend*

In this subsection, I explore how my participants, who identified as white, embraced the stereotype of Oriental femininity to gain approval from their white partners and thus claim superiority over white women. Many interviewees said they asked their boyfriends if their physical or personality traits were more attractive than those of white women. Whether asked this question or not, some white boyfriends praised their Asian girlfriends by contrasting them with white women. Most of my interviewees were satisfied to hear these comments from their boyfriends, especially interviewees who were unsatisfied with their Asian features. Some reported wanting to hear from their boyfriends their traits were more attractive than white women's. Isabel, an international student, addressed this issue by pointing out physical traits Asian women lacked compared to "Western girls:"

I said to him, Asian girls don't have blonde hair and not that, you know, have a very good curve like western girls, and he said he doesn't care like he said black hair's very beautiful.

Isabel's description of herself is framed within an implicit assumption that her boyfriend would prefer blonde hair and curves. Isabel and my other interviewees' criticism of their Asian features parallels Hall's findings (1995) that, because beauty standards usually center around white women, minority women often suffer from low self-esteem. Nadia Kim (2001) also found, because Koreans view white women as possessing ideal beauty, they often try to recreate white

traits by curling their hair; dyeing their hair to lighter colors; and engaging in various plastic surgeries such as eye lid surgery, Rhinoplasty, and breast augmentation. Kaw (1993) also adds that Asian American women undergo cosmetic surgeries due to gender and racial ideologies that “[associate] their natural features with dullness, passivity, and lack of emotion” (74). Nadia Kim’s and Kaw’s findings point to dissatisfaction among some Asian women with their uniquely Asian traits; several of my interviewees expressed a similar dissatisfaction. Some of the women I interviewed were unsatisfied with their Asian features before their boyfriends reassured them. Janice, for example, did not feel confident about her breast size, but she said her boyfriends “liked her Asian features such as her small boobs and soft, very straight hair.” Sophia stated that her boyfriend continually described her as “cute” because she was Asian:

He thought I was just different [from my white classmates]...he said [I had] good hair and good skin. Perfect built. He liked my small size and everything... white people are so tall and I’m so small. He just thought I was cute. All small and tiny. He felt like he needed to protect me. This kid is like 6’2” and I’m like 5’2.” He liked how I am small and cute.

The comments Sophia reports highlight the traits which make her “different” or “exotic” (a common stereotype about Asian women) compared to white women (Espiritu 1997: 94).

Sophia’s boyfriend’s attraction to her petite size, particularly compared with “white people,” is consistent with the image of Asian women being more feminine than white women. His calling her “cute” and his desire to “protect [her]” depict in her boyfriend an air of authority, even depicting Sophia as dependent on him. As Elaine Kim (1990) states, stereotypes of Asian women as sexual and Asian men as asexual “exist to define the white man’s virility and the white man’s superiority” (70). Sophia’s interaction with her boyfriend likewise seems to “define” his “superiority.”

As shown in Sophia’s excerpt, white men often commented, not only on Asian women’s physical traits, but also on Asian women’s personality traits, these comments generally derived

from the white partners' conceptualization of Asian women as "superfemme" (Espiritu 2001:427). When I asked Sarah, an international student, "what were some of your physical or personality traits your boyfriend found attractive?" she answered:

I think the fact that I'm Asian? Because he always complemented on how my hair is straight and silky black. And like high cheek bones. Something that Asians might not necessarily like but sort of born into. Those kind of things can be some of the physical traits and personality traits, he said I was more of an introvert compared to white girls that made me look like a nice girl. That I would be the nice girlfriend.

When I asked Sarah (I) if her boyfriend explicitly stated, "compared to white girls," she said, "Yes, because he was the first white guy I dated. So I asked him 'So what part of me was more attractive than white girls?'" This excerpt has many implications. First, white men may be attracted to their girlfriends' Asian features, even if their girlfriends dislike these features. Earlier, Sarah stated white men were attracted to "Asian girls that Asian girls don't think are cute or pretty. So those who would have Asian features." This comment implies Asian women do not consider women with Asian features as "cute or pretty" (Hall 1995). Second, the comparisons these Asian women ask their boyfriends to make are telling in themselves. These questions suggest an attempt by these Asian women to explain why their boyfriends are deviating from the norm of dating other whites. Third, Asian women often desire white women's looks, which may be one reason why my interviewees chose to compare themselves to white women, not black or Hispanic women (Kim 2001). For instance, Sophia stated Asian women were more attractive than Asian men, but not necessarily more attractive than white women. Fourth, this quote demonstrates Sarah's boyfriend as characterizing Asian women as making "nicer" girlfriends. In other words, white men perceive Asian women as more feminine and introverted than white girls. Liz shared an experience similar to Sarah's (I):

[My white boyfriends] really liked my face, hair and skin. They would look at my skin or touch my hair and they would be like, "I think Asian girls have like the perfect skin or perfect hair." They say like, "Asian girls are really nice. And they smile a lot. They are

really feminine compared to white girls. White girls are boisterous like me.” Umm, they also said Asian girls are [harder] to understand [than white women] because a lot of Asian girls tend to not say much and keep it inside. Even if they feel upset, they say, “It’s okay.” They didn’t like it. They wanted me to be more open and be direct.

This excerpt demonstrates Liz’s experience with her white boyfriends characterizing her as “nice and feminine.” Her boyfriends indirectly imply that boisterous acts are not considered feminine and state that they want Liz to be feminine. Because these white men perceive Asian women as less boisterous, they also believe Asian women will be more reserved and more likely to “keep it inside.” Interestingly, her boyfriends indirectly ask Liz to be both less boisterous than “white girls,” but to be more verbal than the stereotypical Asian woman. In other words, white men only want the best of both worlds.

Sarah (I) not only embraced stereotypes of Asian women as “nicer girlfriends” but used them to criticize white women. She even compared herself to her brother’s white girlfriend to prove she was a “nicer girlfriend:”

For example, I saw this because my brother was dating a white girl. And she would demand more I guess than how I would treat my boyfriend. She would be like, ‘Do something for me. I want you to do this with me.’ She would express her opinion and what she expects him to do. Whereas I would go along with whatever [my boyfriends] said. I think submissive is a really good word even though [Asian women] are not their servants. I think Asian girls are more submissive than white girls.

This excerpt demonstrates a contradiction. As presented in the above sub-section, “Asian Dating Customs Make me Feel Fake,” many Asian women perceived white men as more egalitarian than Asian men. Sarah’s quote demonstrates otherwise—although she is not her boyfriend’s “servant,” she is “submissive.” Sarah is uncritical of the myth of “Oriental femininity.” Espiritu (2001) and Stacy Lee (1996) also found their interviewees embracing the myth of “Oriental femininity”. In the article “We don’t Sleep around like White Girls do,” Yen Le Espiritu discusses how, because Asian women are often idealized as more feminine than white women,



Filipinas “assert cultural superiority over white women” by identifying strongly with their gender, which is one of “the ways racialized immigrants claim through gender the power denied them by racism” (415:2001). Stacey Lee (1996), however, finds that Asian immigrants tend to be less negative toward “positive” Asian stereotypes than were Asian Americans. My interviewees, however, embraced these stereotypes regardless of their citizenship statuses. One Asian American woman, Veronica, however, criticized these “praises” about Asian women and said they served to warn her that her partner may have Yellow Fever.

On the other hand, when I asked Liz how she felt about what her boyfriends’ perceptions of Asian women as superfeminine, she answered, “I feel really good. I feel proud to be Asian. I feel like it’s good that they like my different traits.” Even though she identified herself closely with whites throughout the interview, when she discussed her receiving “praises” from her boyfriend, she suddenly identified herself as “Asian.” I found similar trends with my other interviewees. My respondents chose to embrace the stereotypical feminine characteristics of Asian women, which gave them a sense of superiority over white women—according to their white boyfriends, Asian women made nicer girlfriends than white women. It almost appears as if my participants have a choice as to when they want to classify themselves as white or Asian. Tuan (1998) discusses in her book that middle-class blacks have strived to obtain racial options, “the ability to choose whether to identify or be identified along racial lines”, but have often failed, even if they have achieved middle-class economic status, received white education, and lived close to whites (7). The question is, “Unlike middle-class blacks, do Asian American women dating white men, such as Liz, have racial options? Can they decide when to identify with whites, when to reject Asian values, and when to embrace Asian “Oriental femininity”?

*NO, YOU ARE ASIAN*

Many women who claimed they were able to date white men because they were Americanized or white-washed often shared experiences of feeling left out in their interracial relationships with white men. Instead of treating them as white women, Asian women's boyfriends and boyfriends' parents perceived them as Asian. In the first section, "I Am (Honorary) White," I show Asian women identifying themselves as "honorary whites," believing they, more so than other Asians, will be accepted among whites. In this section, I explore how my interviewees discover racial boundaries in their relationships with white men. This discovery resulted from various kinds of experiences. Some common examples were: white friends' concern about whether Asian women would receive their parents' approval to date white men, white partners and their parents expecting stereotypical Asian behaviors from Asian women, and conflicts with their boyfriends based on different cultural values, resulting in "culture shocks."

In these situations, some interviewees felt the white people involved were distancing them, but others took the situations lightly. These situations, whether based on jokes or on real expectations, represent white parents, boyfriends, and friends distancing these Asian women from the white community. Thus, I disagree with the assimilation theory, which argues Asian women will eventually become the "new white[s]," by engaging in interracial romantic relationships with whites. Ironically, only through these interracial relationships with whites did Asians who once identified as honorary whites discover the racial boundary between themselves and whites. Compared to more casual relationships, romantic relationships are better able to bring individuals together because they intensify interactions between parties, have greater potential to push apart those involved. My interviewees initially became close to their boyfriends; each visited the other's houses, each met the other's parents, and had family dinners together.

These experiences, however, widened the Asian/white gap because they caused the Asian women involved to realize how different they were from their white partners. Next, I explore some of the events and statements that expanded the gap between my interviewees and their boyfriends.

*“You May Be White, But Your Parents Aren’t”*

After these Asian women started dating white men, their white friends often asked them, “Are your parents okay with you dating a white guy?” This question implied to my interviewees their acquired honorary white statuses did not extend to their Asian parents. While my interviewees’ friends asked if my interviewees’ parents approved of their interracial romantic relationships, they asked no such questions about their interracial friendships. This distinction may seem minor, but it has two implications worth considering. While my interviewees were “white” enough to befriend other whites, their friends’ concern about their more socially significant step into dating white men showed them both that their assimilation was not absolute and that their parents were even less accepted. Interestingly these white friends apparently saw no need to ask about the white partners’ parents’ opinions. This difference may result from the idea that Asians are less open-minded about interracial mingling than whites. When I asked Julie and Janice how their friends responded to their dating white men, they said:

Julie: They have questions about how my parents handle his whiteness and stuff.

Janice: Are your parents okay with that? Would they be mad if you dated a white guy? Would they be mad if you married a white guy? Do they really want you to marry someone who is Chinese? Have you ever dated a Chinese guy?

Over time, Janice said she became frustrated with these questions from her peers and boyfriends. She answered her boyfriends, “Yeah. I really don’t think that my parents would be against it. I mean it won’t be the end of their world if I married a white guy.” Even women who criticized

their parents for being “racist” took offense when others assumed their parents were opposed to their interracial relationships. This offense may come either from their respect for their parents or from embarrassment; they may have been either defending their parents or embarrassed that their parents were not racially progressive. Nam (2001) shares many examples of Asian women who are embarrassed by their parents’ less progressive traditions and customs. Nathalie, a Chinese international student, felt the need to defend her parents when her boyfriend pressed the issue:

He asked, “How [do] your parents view your relationship like this? In America, children have more freedom to choose whoever they want to be with.” Maybe he has an impression that Chinese girls *still* have to be obedient to their parents. I told him that my parents are open-minded, especially my dad. (emphasis added)

In this quote Nathalie (I) demonstrates an instance wherein her boyfriend not only questions her parents’ views but asks how Chinese people as a group view dating relationships. Nathalie (I) almost has to defend her own culture; her usage of the word “still” shows that she believes that her boyfriend perceives Chinese culture to be backward; she feels the need to tell him Chinese culture has changed.

Perceptions of Asian parents as closed-minded also influenced interactions between Asian parents and white partners. For instance, many women reported their boyfriends feeling afraid to meet their girlfriends’ parents because of stereotypical images of Asian parents as strict and closed-minded. Mandy shared the experience of her boyfriend meeting her mother for the first time:

You could tell that he was sort of shaking in his boots a little bit but she was really nice to him and made sure that he felt at home and stuff. I think he would have been definitely been more comfortable [if she were white]. But I mean when you get that sort of notion already, it’s hard to get rid of even if you see something else. And so he always had like really good manners and didn’t make a lot of jokes. I think he like was worried about how he was going to act and stuff like that.

In this instance, Mandy’s boyfriend has trouble interacting with Mandy’s mother due to his stereotypical image of Asian parents as strict and closed-minded. She later said, because many of

the Asian students at her school had strict parents, “people just assumed that across the board, all Asian parents are like that.” This shows, even *if* friends and boyfriends perceive these Asian women as Americanized or white, they assume that these Asian women had parents who were stereotypically Asian.

White partners expressed this stereotypical view most often after visiting their girlfriends’ homes for family meals. White men often felt uncomfortable and even dumbfounded because they were ignorant of Asian table manners. This discomfort with Asian table manners created a gap between the white men and their Asian partners. These encounters showed the white men involved that something foreign to them was second nature to their partners. Veronica shared her experience:

The food was always kind of an issue, because they were never used to eating traditional Chinese food. People think Chinese food is like oh General Tso’s chicken, and Sesame chicken. We actually don’t eat things that are full of MSGs. And that was always because it was always like a weird thing because in American style eating, like you have separate plates, you fill up your plates and pass around everything else and that’s it. You know what I mean? You want more, you grab it. But for us, you get a bowl of rice, put everything in the middle and everyone shares. So it’s like completely different style of eating. And I think they were really weirded out by that. Because you know how, your mom probably does that too, when there’s guest, they’re like eat more eat more and like spoon on to your bowl versus like Americans’ “Okay, I can do it myself.” that kind of thing. That was like the weirdest thing I guess. And then as far as everything else, it was fine. I know like very American, they are like very like napkin, fork, knife, and blah blah blah versus like you, all the same chopstick. You know what I mean? You don’t divide it up in the beginning. You like keep picking on it. So that was something that was really weird that they had to assimilate to. Then after a while, they just wouldn’t have dinner at my house which is kind of sad. Because they were like, “It makes me feel weird.”

Veronica’s quote demonstrates her boyfriends’ declining her invitations due to their dislike of Chinese food and their discomfort with Chinese table manners and customs. Although Veronica was accustomed to both American and Chinese customs, neither her white boyfriends nor her parents were familiar with both sets of customs, which “weirded out” Veronica’s boyfriends. As Veronica stated, she became “sad” that her boyfriends would stop eating at her house.

Veronica's sadness may result from her boyfriend's rejecting her heritage cuisine, one of the strong cultural customs American-born Asians tend to hold on to. Thus, Veronica's boyfriend's discomfort created tension over one of the few Asian cultural customs she appreciates. Researchers have found that American born immigrants may reject Asian holiday traditions, gender values, and customs but be attached to traditional Asian food (Nam 2001). Tuan (1998), in her study of third generation Asians, says many of her subjects still ate ethnic foods regularly, especially rice, even when eating non-Asian main dishes. Similar to Veronica's experience, even when Asian women were familiar with American food and table manners, they still held strongly to Asian food culture. This realization often caused Asian women who once identified as honorary white and therefore assumed dating white men would involve little cultural conflict to rethink their statuses. Asian women realized that dating relationships often extend beyond the couple to include the couples' parents, and that they were more attached to Asian ethnic food than they thought.

White boyfriends, often uncomfortable with the Asian culinary traditions they found at their girlfriends' houses, hoped the encounters would "go smoother" if their girlfriends visited their white families. Brianna's boyfriend invited her home by telling her, "You need more Western food. You have too much Asian food." Asian women assumed, because they thought they were considered honorary white among their friends at school they would have less difficulty at their white boyfriends' houses adjusting to white culture than their boyfriends had when adjusting to Asian culture. Although Asian women were familiar with the food served or with the table manners expected in white homes, they faced a different set of problems.

*Stereotypes- Smart Foreigners*

Due to their familiarity with American culture, Asian women expected to face few problems with their white partners' families. Although this was often true, they were surprised when white parents asked questions based on stereotypical images of Asians. A related problem tended to emerge when white boyfriends interacted with their girlfriends based on their stereotypical images of Asians as smart and foreign.

Many women shared that their boyfriends' parents expected them to be smart, and white parents displayed these expectations in various ways. When I asked Janice if her partners' parents had preconceptions of her because she was Asian, Janice said they had hoped their sons would perform better academically after dating Janice:

[My ex-boyfriends' parents] assumed that I am smart. Umm, but I was like third in my class in high school. So that was like a really big deal to my second boyfriend's mother, because he was kind of like a fuck up. He almost didn't graduate. I think that my boyfriends' parents always thought I was the better influence on their kids because their son would usually stop doing drugs and like, started doing school work.

Although all of her white boyfriends' parents thought she was smart because she was Asian, her second boyfriend's mother especially believed Janice was smart because she was third in her class. Her boyfriend's mother may have perceived Janice as intelligent because of her class ranking, but she may have thought Janice achieved this ranking because she was Asian. Several other interviewees described partners' parents who attributed these women's high SAT scores, GPAs, and class rankings to the fact that they were Asian.

Some stated that white families' stereotypical views of Asians as smart even shaped their conversation topics. They said many of their conversation topics with white parents were more intellectual in nature than topics usually addressed in daily conversations (e.g. sports, weather, and family). When I asked Claudia if her white boyfriend's parents had preconceptions of her because she was Asian, she answered:

That I am smart. I think they just kind of assume that. [Interviewer: What makes you think that?] I mean the conversation they try to start with me and things like that. They will ask me like, more about the news or more about academic stuff because they feel like they can have an intellectual conversation with me.

Claudia's quote demonstrates one of many ways white parents' expectations of Asian women as smart affect their relationships.

In addition to stereotypes of Asians as smart, Asians as foreigners was another common stereotype white families held about Asian women, reinforcing these women's feelings of exclusion. Veronica, for instance, said:

His family would always ask me like really awkward questions. Like one time I was sitting down at dinner and like "Do you guys even celebrate Thanksgiving? Thanksgiving is American founders day." like "Yes, Of course we celebrate Thanksgiving." And they were like, "Do you celebrate Christmas? Do you celebrate Easter?" I'm like, "We're not aliens." You know what I mean? I grew up in America and we have American culture and stuff. We're like taught to think it's important and stuff. Like if I were Caucasian, no one would have asked any questions you know.

Here, Veronica points out that if she were Caucasian, she would have not received questions about her and her family's level of assimilation into American culture. Veronica realized Asians, even if they were born and grew up in America, would be viewed as foreigners. There is ample literature supporting Veronica's conclusion that Asians, regardless of their years spent in America, are regarded as "forever foreigners." Tuan (1998) states, "Despite many Asian Americans being longtime daughters and sons of this nation, some with lineages extending back to the 1800s, many people continually view and treat them as outsiders or foreigners within their own country" (2). Similarly, Veronica realizes that unless she is "Caucasian," people will continue to doubt her American status.

When people asked Samantha (I), "Oh, why are you dating a white guy? It's not going to work out or whatever," she would respond by stating, "I spent time here and I know how, like, usually people do stuff or whatever, so it's [not a] big deal." She experienced a conflict, though,



due to two intertwining problems: lack of cultural understanding from her boyfriend's mother and her boyfriend's labeling her as a "foreigner". Samantha said:

His mom didn't really like me at first because I didn't talk much. Like then she [thought] I [was] rude. But in Asia, if you don't talk, that's not considered rude—just [a] comfortable silence. Sometimes I couldn't understand so like I just don't respond, and she'd probably [thought] I'm rude. And then, like, he got into [a] fight, not into fight, but argument with his mom because of me. Because his mom told him, like, she thinks I'm rude and stuff and he was like, I'm foreign. I'm foreigner so sometimes I don't understand. Sometimes I don't understand [when] she talks really fast too.

Samantha's boyfriend labeling her as a "foreigner" was a bitter-sweet experience for her. She said it was hurtful and surprising because she perceived herself as Americanized and therefore believed that dating white men would not be hard for her. Her boyfriend labeled her as a foreigner to explain to his mother why Samantha was having difficulty understanding her. Even though this labeling surprised Samantha, it reduced the misunderstanding between Samantha and her boyfriend's mother. In other words, his labeling her as a "foreigner," whether she agreed or not, justified behavior his mother would have thought rude. Although Samantha did not state that this was the sole experience that caused her to change her mind about wanting to date white men, this experience caused her to reconsider the difficulties her decision might entail.

Asian women perceived stereotypes from their boyfriends less negatively than stereotypes from their boyfriends' parents. This may be why fewer of my interviewees reported having heard stereotypical comments from their partners compared to their partners' parents. Many perceived Asian stereotypical comments from their boyfriends as "jokes." Mandy and Sophia shared some of these "jokes" with me:

Mandy: He was nice and he kind of like embraced the fact that I was Asian and like he sometimes would make fun of me playfully. "Oh, we shouldn't go to hibachi restaurant because you are going to just criticize it." He sort of like, he liked having that sort of unique thing about me that like not every girl had but like I mean I guess he was just funny.

Sophia: Most of the things he said were really funny. Sometimes it was super racist. I felt like this kid was extremely white. Like his family was really Southern. They wore Camo. They were extremely Southern and extremely white. Sometimes it was really funny but very cruel. He was very conservative for Republicans. He would make fun of black people. He would make fun of people. Fat, black.... Just like if it's a racist joke, he will laugh. He has a thing for making fun of black people or fat people. And stuff like that. When he made fun of Asians, he's teasing. He will say like "Oh, do you know why there are no roller coasters in China? Because no one's tall enough to ride them." Or stuff like that. Some of them are more funny but like once in awhile, it's little bit cruel. I'd be like, Philip, that's pretty bad. He's like "Hmm...It's true." He says stuff like that. None of them were terribly cruel. But thinking back at it now, now that I am older, I don't know if I will tolerate it.

Unlike Mandy who merely found her boyfriend's jokes funny, Sophia found these jokes cruel as well as funny. It is important to note her statement that she may not be able to "tolerate" these racist jokes anymore. She dated her white boyfriend, Philip, during high school when she identified herself as "white-washed." She said, after dating him, she realized she was not as white-washed as she had once believed. Now in college, she is dating a Chinese man, and she stated that she enjoys being able to mix Chinese and English with him. Thus, her interracial dating experience helped her realize the existence of the boundary between whites and Asians; she could not cross these boundaries by dating and befriending whites, being fluent in English, or performing as well as, or even better than whites academically.

Relying on stereotypes of Asians as being smart, white men often attempted to benefit from advantage of their Asian girlfriends by asking for academic help. When asked if her boyfriend treated her differently because she was Asian, Heather, an international student, shared her frustration with her boyfriend:

He never studied. [I would say], "Come study, study, study." He would say, "No." He won't do his work. I did his work all the time. I felt bad so I did it for him, but I kind of felt that he was expecting that from me. He knew that Asians are smart. I personally think that he was trying to take advantage of that because he kept asking me all the quiz questions and test questions, but I never did.

From this quote, we learn Heather (I) was frustrated for several reasons: her boyfriend would not study, instead expecting her to do his work for him. Additionally, he tried to cheat on his exams by asking Heather (I) to provide him with exam answers. While her boyfriend may have had objective reasons for expecting Heather (I) to have accurate test answers, the key point in this instance is Heather's perception. She felt he treated her this way because she was Asian. These white men, as their parents often did, expected academic benefits from dating Asian women. In short, these women felt distanced or "othered".

Many of my interviewees also said their boyfriends asked them about Asian cultures and languages. Although most enjoyed sharing their cultures and languages and did not recognize this act as their boyfriends' treating them as foreigners, Veronica recognized this and reported her discomfort:

[My boyfriend] asked me to speak Chinese to him sometimes. I thought that was weird. He would just be like, "Oh, say something in Chinese." I'm like "Why? I'm not a parrot."

It is clear from this quote and the quote above, wherein Veronica describes her boyfriends' parents asking if her family celebrates American holidays, that she wants to be treated as white and does not want to discuss Chinese culture or languages with white families. In the theoretical racial triangulation, regardless of any superiority gained by Asians' from high levels of education and socioeconomic statuses, they are treated as foreigners. Not all, however, were disappointed at being assigned "foreign" status. Many women enjoyed sharing their Asian ethnic customs with their partners and their partners' parents. The problem I propose in this section is that Asian women, similar to middle class blacks, have no racial options about "whether to identify or be identified along racial lines;" ethnic options are out of the question (Tuan 1998:7). Waters (1990) mentions in her book *Ethnic Options* that white Americans have "ethnic options" which allow them to decide when and how ethnicity influences their lives. Asians, in contrast, have long been

lumped together as “Asians” for the sake of convenience despite their different ethnic experiences. In addition to not having ethnic options, Asians do not even have racial options. In the sub-section “But I’ll be Asian if it Makes Me a Nicer Girlfriend,” Asian women think they have racial options—if being an Asian woman means being a “nicer girlfriend,” they *will* be Asian. Asian women realize soon that they do not have the liberty to choose whether to be identified as white or as Asian; their boyfriends and these boyfriends’ parents use Asian stereotypes to send the message to Asian women: “No, You Are Asian.”

*“Culture Shocks”*

Of the thirty Asian women I interviewed, Julie identified most strongly with whites. She stated at one point, “I honestly feel like I was supposed to be born white.” It was therefore surprising to hear Julie stating that she and her boyfriend of three years had a “big conflict” as a result of cultural differences:

Julie: We actually had a pretty big conflict with like his family because I’m like really close to his family and like since we’ve been dating for so long, I’ve gotten accustomed to their ways and stuff but then like they [have a] house in Bahamas, and I’ve gone there before. But then this time, I wanted to bring my brother and they have planned it, but then like um they’ve always ended up paying for my ticket and everything like all my expenses and then this time, it ended up being I had to pay for my expenses and like my ticket and my brother’s ticket and everything like that. And it ended up being a bit of an issue. I didn’t really like... I wasn’t very happy with... because it just seemed, like whole drama it just seemed a little bit shallow to me because it’s never been like something that was a big deal before. I don’t know. I don’t really understand the whole deal of it. I think it was like a big misunderstanding like it’s blown over and we’ve talked about it and like it was just misunderstanding that they thought that I just didn’t want to pay and I thought that like, and then like my contention was that like well if it’s like that much money, then like I’d rather not go. I’ve just never like gone on vacations where like if you’re invited, you have to pay. It’s usually if you’re invited, [your hosts] pay for you. It was just like a, I think it was just a big culture shock. I just don’t think like that.

Interviewer: What do you mean by culture shock?

Julie: Because um, I’ve always been raised to think that if you invited somebody out or something or like you do something for somebody then you don’t expect anything in return. And I think it’s just something either with their family or like in general like I’ve

noticed that like Caucasian people are more inclined to say that I'll invite you to vacation but you pay for the plane ticket or the cost and stuff. So it's like, it's just different culture and believe in different things. And you can't really like change it because it's just like all like that.

Interviewer: When you guys are in conflict do you guys ever say it might be due to culture or things like that?

Julie: Umm, I've mentioned it to him. I didn't really say it to his parents. I didn't really like talk to his parents that much about because it was just uncomfortable but um I mentioned it to him and he like understood where I was coming from but he just didn't necessarily agree which was frustrating. I ended up getting an internship so like we just, we're just not gonna go altogether? But like I think originally if I didn't get the internship I don't think I would've gone anyway just because like like I just I just don't believe in that kinda thing.

The conflict between Julie and her boyfriend was caused by their differing customs. Julie had been raised by her parents to believe hosts should cover all expenses whereas Julie's partner's parents' did not share this value. Through this conflict with her boyfriend's family, Julie realized that, perhaps not all, but at least some of her values were different from those of "Caucasian people" who, in her opinion, were less likely than Asians to pay for their guests' expenses. Regardless of the extent to which this conflict was or was not cultural, essential for this discussion is Julie's perception that their unwillingness to pay was a function of their whiteness.

Although Janice did not have any overt conflicts with her boyfriends, she became irritated with her boyfriends' "lazy" attitude. Janice said:

I have secretly thought to myself, man, my boyfriend is so fucking lazy. I could almost see what my parents are talking about. My boyfriends would always be like, "You are really stressed out. You need to stop listening to your parents so much." Even though I hated my parents so much [for always pushing me to work hard], if I could be half the people they are, I would consider myself pretty successful because I don't know anyone who works harder than my parents. And I think that, I hate to say that, but my parents were right about some things. And my boyfriends themselves won't be able to appreciate as much as I do because they don't have like a background like my parents. And their parents don't either.

This quote demonstrates Janice relating to her parents' work ethic, which she had at one time criticized. Although other women did not share the exact experience Janice had, many Asian

women realized that their “parents were right about some things.” One of these things included Asian parents’ warning their daughters about complications they may have when dating white men. After discovering racial boundaries in their relationships with white men, many felt stuck. As Megan stated, she is too white to date recently-immigrated Asian men, but white men cannot relate to her parents’ immigration experiences. In addition, she is concerned that she does not “look good together” with white men, but she is also concerned that others will mistake her Asian boyfriends for her siblings. So where should these Asian women turn?

### *FEELING STUCK*

In this section, I aim to discuss the different ways Asian women chose to address the discovery of racial boundaries between whites and themselves. In the sub-sections, “Maybe I’m not White After All” and “Ambassador, Tell us About White People,” I discuss Asian women feeling excluded from both white and Asian communities. In the final sub-section, “Oh well...,” I discuss some of the different ways Asian women chose to handle their feeling stuck.

#### *Maybe I’m not White After All*

Many women described a process of transformation in their thinking about their racial identities. Sophia shares her experience:

[When we started dating], I noticed that he was white. I was like “Yeah, he’s white.” But at the same time, I felt pretty white washed myself. So to me, mentally, I thought we were at the same level. I felt like we were same mental level. And yes, I sometimes felt like it was a bit strange that I was dating a white person. You know? But all my life, I expected that to happen. You know you grow up with white people, you expect that you will date white person. But sometimes, when I was dating with him, once in awhile, it will be so strange. Like he was white white. We are talking about blue eyes, blonde hair, white. And I was like Asian to the core looking. And so sometimes I felt like we stuck out a little... We thought we had the same mindset, but overtime, we realized how different we are. Mentally we are the same but in terms of culture, we are just so different.

Sophia had mainly associated with whites in high school because she perceived herself as having the same mindset as whites. She described later how an accumulation of conflicts—her parents imposing a stricter curfew on her than her white boyfriend’s parents did, a rule he failed to understand and her boyfriend making stereotypical Asian jokes—led them to end their relationship. In addition to these conflicts, Sophia also mentions feeling uncomfortable—she and her boyfriend “[sticking] out a little” because of his being “*white white*” and her being “Asian to the core looking.” Megan shared a similar idea. As mentioned earlier, Megan was concerned that she and her white boyfriend did not “look good together:”

I’m really self-conscious about dating someone who is white also. I mentioned the brother thing with Asian boys. I’m also kind of uncomfortable when I’m with white guys because I feel like we just don’t look good together. I haven’t seen an Asian-white couple where I think, “Oh wow, you guys look good together.” Maybe it’s just me. I know I’m subjective. That’s my fear that I won’t look good. Or I look out of place or we look out of place. We just don’t look compatible. I know it doesn’t matter because end of the day, it’s me and John Doe. And not the rest of the world. It’s just me and John Doe. At the end of the day, I wasn’t comfortable exactly. I feel like I did get weird stares if it was just walking down the hall. Even seeing my friends who are half Asian, half white and I look at their parents. And I’m like, “You guys are odd looking pair.” I don’t know.

Thus, because of several factors, including, disagreements, misunderstandings based on stereotypes, and cultural conflicts, and feeling “out of place” with their boyfriends, many Asian women reported feeling excluded. They became less certain about their views on dating white men, an arrangement they once thought would feel natural, since they were socially close to whites. Asian American women realized, even if they were perceived as white, their parents were often not familiar with white culture, which caused uneasiness between their boyfriends and their parents. As their relationships progressed, Asian women frequently heard stereotypical Asian “jokes,” which even if their boyfriends did not mean to cause harm, created distance between Asian women and their partners. These moments served to invalidate these women’s claim, “We don’t see race,” or their belief that they would be treated as white women. Despite

the similarities between these Asian women and the white men they dated, it seems their differences became more apparent over the course of dating. White parents' questions about Asian cultures caused these women to feel more excluded from American culture. The accumulation of all these experiences often resulted in Asian women questioning their once-held belief that they were "Americanized enough to date white men without a problem."

*Ambassador, Tell us about White People*

While dating white men, Asian women realized that they were often treated as outsiders. Some tried to find niches by turning to Asian friends and acquaintances. In this section, I show that my interviewees were not only treated as outsiders by white partners and these partners' parents, but also by Asian friends, acquaintances, and even their own parents. Asian friends and parents treated these women as more distant because of their experiences of dating white men. Julie said both her friends and parents asked her questions about information she had gained while dating white men. Her parents were curious about white men's parents:

Because my boyfriend's parents were divorced and they like have questions [on] how they like work that out because [they were divorced] when [my boyfriend] was growing up and all that stuff. Asian people usually don't get divorced so [my parents] just don't know how it worked.

It is intriguing that Julie's parents would ask her about how divorces work based on her experience with her boyfriend, expecting her to serve as a window into white social practice. Because people tend to have this expectation, it is more likely for Asian women who have dated white men to receive more questions about whites. These Asian women become ambassadors to their family members; dating a white man seems to be a mark of insider status to white culture.

Researchers studying interracial couples, especially black-white couples have explored the topic of minorities receiving criticism for "ditching their race" (Craig-Henderson 2006;



Craig-Henderson 2011; Nemoto 2009; Root 2001). Questioning about white culture is a less explicit way minorities create boundaries between those who date within versus outside their race. Although the people asking these questions did not often criticize my interviewees for dating white men or “ditching their race,” these questions processes implied to my interviewees that they were also outsiders to the Asian community.

Some women did not share experiences of their parents asking them about white families. Because I did not specifically ask my interviewees, “Did your parents ever ask you about your white partner’s families?” I cannot conclude that my interviewees did not receive any such questions from their parents. Julie shared her experience while answering questions about how her parents responded to her dating white men. Most women stated that their friends, when they heard about their dating experiences with white men, asked them about differences between Asian men and white men. These are some of the ways my interviewees responded:

Liz: (When answering her male Asian friends) I just tell them, they are not that different. You should try dating a white girl. They are like, “White girls don’t like us.”

Isabel (I): that I have no comparison because I um I haven’t [had a] very deep [dating relationship] with my Chinese boyfriend so I cannot compare, I don’t know the difference.

It was apparent in many cases that these Asian women were trying to avoid answering their friends’ questions. For example, when I asked these women for some of the differences they found between Asian men and white men, they discussed which men were more likely to pay for their girlfriends’ meals, show more affection in public, and call them by pet names. Thus, though my interviewees were readily able to share with me differences they saw between Asian men and white men, they often avoided their friends’ questions by changing the subject, by stating “I don’t know” or by making jokes.

In addition to having had friends ask about differences between white and Asian men, many were confronted with questions about white men's sexual organs and about sexual activities these Asian women had engaged in with white men. I discuss some below:

Liz: They ask, "Do they have like a big penis?" or "Did you already do it all?" But actually, I see a lot of my Asian friends, and Asian guys are almost the same. It's a real stereotype. I would tell them that [my white boyfriend] totally respects my opinion about everything. If I don't want to do that kind of stuff, he understands and doesn't do it. I would be like, "I bet you do more than I do." [laughs] Just jokingly. I joke around so we can [the] change subject.

Isabel (I): [My Chinese friends] always think American guys, they're physically stronger and um and sexually stronger. They will think that. When we played the truth or dare, they would ask me questions about the (laughs). I drink wine to not answer it.

Heather (I): [My Korean friends] asked if their pubic hair is blond. But I couldn't answer that because I didn't know the answer to it.

Liz and Isabel (I) tried to avoid answering the questions asked of them, and Heather merely became uncomfortable. In addition to these three women, many of my interviewees, especially international students, shared similar experiences to those presented above. Questions about white families and white men's sexual traits indicate Asians perceiving relationships with white men as constituting privileged statuses, making these women different from Asians who have not dated whites. My interviewees disliked answering these questions because they did not consciously choose the role of ambassador between Asians and whites. Most importantly, this privileged status creates a distance between these Asian women and their interlocutors. In addition to feeling isolated from white culture, a feeling these women developed while dating white men, these women often were set-apart from other Asians who perceived these women as outsiders—ambassadors of white culture.

*Oh Well...*

In this section, I discuss some of the steps my interviewees took based on their outsider statuses in relation to both the white and Asian cultures. Most attempted to cast the discrimination they received while dating white men in a positive light. The most common optimistic view was, “dating white men is easier than dating black men.” My interviewees often compared themselves to Asian women who were dating black men, saying complications that arose while dating white men were nothing compared to the problems their friends faced while dating black men. Joyce talked about problems her Asian roommate (pseudonym: Victoria) was facing while dating a black man, specifically when broaching the issue with her parents:

My roommate was um, she was actually hinting to her parents, she was like, “Umm, what if I dated a black guy?” Her parents started laughing because they thought she was joking because they think it’s so far-fetched for her to be with a black guy.

Victoria’s parents mistook the possibility of Victoria dating a black man as a joke. Joyce was not satisfied with her parents’ response to her dating her white partner, but she said their response was much better than the response Victoria received from her parents. Some of my interviewees also talked about receiving more looks when they were on dates with black men than when they were on dates with their white boyfriends. From these experiences, they inferred that if they dated black men, they would receive many more negative comments and much more discrimination from the public.

Earlier, I mentioned Veronica’s being upset with her boyfriend for asking her to speak in Chinese and with her boyfriend’s parents for asking her if her family celebrated American holidays. Veronica decided to assume a positive outlook on this discrimination from her white boyfriends’ parents:

I mean like even when I’m like bombarded with questions about being Chinese, it’s actually nice that people have interest in that. I feel like with white family and stuff, they’re more like, “Oh like this is interesting, this is exotic,” and like try extra hard or

something. Sometimes it's nice. It's a lot easier to make friends with his mom and be like friends with her if I like can like show her things and spend time together talking about crap like that then like...uh... awkward...and the guys I feel like they're more gentlemanly [than Asian guys].

Veronica realized, even though answering questions about Chinese culture made her feel like a foreigner, it provided a topic of conversation for her and her boyfriend's mother. Additionally, she told herself that white men were more "gentlemanly" than Asian men which may be her way to compensate for the discriminatory remarks she received from her boyfriend and his friends (She described how his friends teased him for having "Yellow Fever").

Not all my interviewees had ready solutions for dealing with their outsider statuses in relation to both white and Asian communities. Julie, for instance, decided to "just roll with the punches" with her situation. Regardless of her desire to be honorary white, she realized people would inevitably see her as Asian. Some decided to focus on academics and wait to find romantic partners. Regardless of the discrimination these Asian women faced while dating white men, most women did not alter their hopes of marrying white men. Isabel (I) was the only woman who stated that her dating experiences caused her to lose interest in dating or marrying white men in the future. Compared to other women, Isabel (I) was unique in that she did not identify herself as Americanized or as an honorary white. Isabel (I) stated that she never planned to or envisioned herself dating white men. She said she would have never dated her white ex-boyfriend if he had not had the "Chinese personality".

Many of my interviewees said they would consider dating and marrying Asian men due to their discovery of the racial boundary distancing them from whites. Except for Isabel (I), however, no one stated that the experience of exclusion caused her to eliminate white men from their potential dating or marriage partners. For example, Megan and Heather (I), despite their discovery of the racial boundaries affecting them, were hesitant to give up a dream they had

formed as teenagers, what they called their “American Dream:” *blond hair, blue eyes, and tall... the perfect, white American guy to marry and to live in suburbia with the white picket fence with the nice cars with the boat house* (Heather and Megan).

## IMPLICATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

Thus far, I have examined interracial dating relationships between Asian women and white men with a focus on assimilation theory. I disagree with assimilation theory, which argues that minorities, especially model minorities, will eventually assimilate into white culture. My findings show interracial relationships do not indicate assimilation. In fact, most women I interviewed had different, almost contradictory, experiences. Many women already perceived themselves as assimilated into white culture before dating white men. To them, dating white men served as a symbol of full assimilation. During their dating relationships, however, these women learned that their white partners and especially these partners’ parents perceived them as “smart foreigners.” A few differences these women had from their white partners became more salient as they started spending time together. For example, my interviewees learned through dating whites that their family values, culinary customs, and work ethics were different from their partners’. These differences were not as apparent to these women while they were only friends with whites. My interviewees realized these differences through such interactions as visiting white families, bringing their white partners home, and spending large amounts of time with their white partners (i.e. trying to study together). Thus, my interviewees realized that they were not as “white washed” or Americanized as they had once believed. Through dating white men, these Asian women discovered the racial boundary between whites and honorary whites.

My interviewees talked at length about their partners’ dread at meeting these women’s parents, about their parents’ rudeness to their boyfriends, and about their embarrassment at this

rude behavior. Additionally, they stated, although white parents were welcoming, many clearly held stereotypical views of Asian women. During their relationships, the most surprising realization for these women was that many times, white partners did not perceive these women as honorary whites. Instead, they expected stereotypical Asian behaviors; more specifically, they expected and wanted these Asian women to be more feminine than white women.

Based on my findings, I argue that the rising rate of interracial dating does not indicate a higher assimilation rate. Several important questions arise because of these factors. First, there is a gender disparity between Asian women and men in the rate of interracial dating with whites. A higher rate of Asian women than Asian men date whites. If the rising rate of interracial dating with whites indicates a higher rate of assimilation, will Asian women assimilate at a faster rate than Asian men? Second, people from some Asian nationalities are dating whites at much higher rates than other Asians. For example, Japanese women marry white men at the highest rate compared to women of other Asian nationalities (O'Brien 2008). Since people from different nationalities and ethnicities are lumped together as "Asians" in America, if assimilation occurs through dating whites, would some Asian nationalities become more assimilated than others? Third, according to previous research, Asian women often face more discrimination because white men, compared to Asian men, are not as understanding of discrimination against Asians. Nemoto (2009) found that white men often had a color-blind view of different racisms Asian women faced, and discouraged them from reporting these discriminations.

Lastly, Alba (2009) argues that the increasing number of biracial children who are half white will also increase the likelihood of assimilation among Asians and Latinos, as these biracial children are more likely to marry whites. Although I only interviewed two Korean-white biracial women, their experiences did not paint pictures of less discrimination and easier

assimilation than those painted by Asian women. Many of my Asian interviewees assumed that their white-Asian children would face less discrimination than they had experienced. However, my interviews with Asian-white women indicated otherwise. I will discuss my findings on biracial women when discussing future research near the end of this section.

Not only are minorities women in interracial relationships with whites not becoming more assimilated through their dating, but they also often face the same amount of discrimination as, or more than, other Asian women. When they are faced with discrimination, their white partners are less likely than Asian partners to sympathize with them, often encouraging them not to report these incidents. Because these white men do not experience racial discrimination on a daily basis as much as Asian women do, they are less likely to see others' negative behaviors towards their partners as racist (Chou & Feagin 2008; Nemoto 2009). Thus, interracial dating often does not serve as a chance to engage in healthy racial discussions, as many researchers hoped.

Although my study has generalizability for East and Southeast Asian college students dating white men, there are limitations. All my interviewees had highly educated and financially stable parents. My interviewees' parents likewise encouraged their daughters to date and marry men who were highly educated and from financially stable backgrounds. For example, although many parents approved of their daughters' dating white men, they did not want their daughters to date white men who were uneducated or who had poor parents. Consequently, most of my interviewees' white partners were sons of middle or upper class parents. Experiences of Asian women and white men's interracial relationships may differ if they were of different socioeconomic statuses. Additionally, I did not account for the U.S. regions of my interviewees' backgrounds. Some of my interviewees were born and raised in the Southern United States, and

some were born and raised in typically more racially diverse states, such as New York, California, and Florida. These women from more diverse states faced similar amounts of discrimination from their white partners' parents but were less likely to receive "stares" from the public compared to Asian women who were dating in the Southern part of the country. Women from more diverse states believed the commonality of interracial dating in these states, made their partners less likely to discuss their interracial dating statuses.

Future research should focus on the regions of the country where these women were raised and dated these white men. From my limited study of the region variable, I found that women in the southern part of the United States received more negative responses from the public and friends than women in the northern part of the country. Because racism in certain regions tends to be more color-blind, people are less likely to state their true opinions of interracial dating to interracial couples. Additionally, these comments and stares from strangers did not matter much to couples dating interracially. It was their parents' treatments of their daughters' white partners and moments of feeling excluded from white families that created the most complex situations for Asian women. Thus, I hypothesize region of the United States does not matter much when studying experiences of Asian women with their white partners, these partner's parents, and the Asian family. However, this hypothesis is based on my data, which did not control for different regions of the country. Results may differ if consistent numbers of women from each region were interviewed or surveyed.

Future research should also focus on interviewing white men in these relationships. Nemoto (2009) interviewed both Asian women and their white partners, but her being an Asian woman might have biased the interview data with white men. To learn the true feelings and experiences of white men in these relationships, a white male interviewer should conduct



interviews with white men. Researches should focus on these questions: Do white men realize that their Asian partners are feeling left out? What are their experiences with Asian families? Additionally, why do some interracial relationships last whereas others do not? If interracial dating is not the solution to racial animosities, what is the answer to decreasing the animosities between different races?

Lastly, Asian-white biracial women should be studied further. I was surprised to find the complexity of the experiences these women had. The two women I interviewed discussed tensions between their white fathers and Asian mothers over which race they wanted their daughters to marry. During their dating relationships, Asian men expected these biracial women to be white women and white men expected them to be Asian women. Sometimes, they had Asian partners who wanted to teach them to be more Asian and white partners who wanted them to neglect their Asian heritage and be fully white. These findings may only be unique to the two women I interviewed. Thus, future research should interview a larger sample of Asian-white biracial women to explore their dating experiences and test the theory that they will be assimilated to white culture.

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## APPENDIX A

*Recruitment Fliers*

## Are you an Asian Woman?



## Are you currently dating a White Man or have dated a White Man?

Please help me with my honors thesis by participating in a one hour face-to-face interview. This study is conducted under supervision of my faculty advisor, Dr. Amanda Lewis.

To be eligible you must be:

1. Age **18** or older
2. An (**East or Southeast Asian**) OR (of **East or Southeast Asian origin**)
3. **Currently dating** or **have dated** a **White American man** (non-Hispanic)
4. An **Undergraduate** student or a **graduate** student
5. A daughter of **Asian parents** (not adopted by parents of other races)

*\* East Asian countries are China, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan.*

*\* Southeast Asian countries are Brunei, Burma, Cambodia, East Timor, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam)*

This study will focus on (1) experiences of Asian women in interracial relationships with white men (2) if and how Asian women-white men's relationships have been shaped by cross-racial natures (3) how Asian women's peers, parents, and the public respond to the Asian women's relationships with white men (4) how Asian women respond to these reactions

INCENTIVES: \$10 per interview

Interested? Please contact:

Sungeun Bae

## APPENDIX B

### *Interview Script*

#### **BACKGROUND / NEIGHBORHOOD/ HIGH SCHOOL**

- Tell me a little about where you grew up.
- How would you describe your neighborhood?
- Describe the high school you have attended.
  - I know many schools strive for diversity. Would you say your high school was diverse?
  - Did students associate with other students of backgrounds different from their own? What about yourself?

#### **FAMILY**

- Tell me about your family when you were growing up.
  - Would you say you grew up in a traditional family? Why do you say so? Can you give me an example?
  - How much do your parents' opinions about whom you date matter to you? Could you think of some examples of when your parents' opinions factored into your decision?

#### **FRIENDS**

- Can you provide initials of a few of your closest friends? Describe them to me and explain to me how you became friends with them.
- If you hang out with them in a group, what are some characteristics of your group?

#### **RELATIONSHIP- Current/Latest**

- Can you walk me through how the relationship began?
  - It seems like you met most of you friends through (classes, clubs, jobs etc.) Is that where you met your (current boyfriend/last ex-boyfriend) too?
- Did his race or your race make it difficult for you to make your decision to pursue a relationship with him?
- What were some of his physical and/or personality traits you found attractive?
- What are some of the physical and/or personality traits of yours he found attractive?
- Describe the relationship to me.
  - What is your typical date like?
    - Can you describe the kinds of people you feel most comfortable with when you are with your boyfriend?
    - How do you guys plan dates?
    - How did you guys pay for meals, coffee etc.?
  - What are some of the biggest conflicts between you and your boyfriend?

- Would you say there are any issues of cultural conflict? If so, can you give me an example?
      - Do you think your relationship would be different if he were Asian? If so, how?
- Do you think there are any benefits to dating a white guy?

### **RELATIONSHIP- Approval from Others**

- What factors influenced your decision to tell parents and peers or not tell them you were dating him?
- Have you ever met his family or visited his house?
- Has he ever met your family or visited your house?
- Can you give me an example of a positive respond or a negative respond, if any?
  - How did their responses make you feel?
- How do you want your parents, peers, and strangers to treat you guys?
- Do you think others support interracial dating? Why or why not? Does the support level differ by race of the couple?
- Women I have interviewed previously told me they have received negative comments especially from Asian guys such as “I didn’t know you were into white guys” or “It’s yellow fever.” How do you think these women should react to these responses?

### **ASIAN-WHITE RELATIONSHIP- Gender Disparity**

- There are about twice as many Asian women dating white men as Asian men dating white women. Why do you think this is the case?
- Would you say the reasons you mentioned are the same reasons that influenced two of you to date?
- Do you think the public believe you to be dating for the same reasons you mentioned earlier? If so, can you give me an example as to why you think this way? How does this example make you feel?

### **RELATIONSHIP- Past**

- Have you had other boyfriends in the past? Can you describe them?
- What motivated you to change your dating pattern when you first dated a white man?
- Did you notice any changes in your behavior when you were dating a white man versus an Asian man? If so, can you give me an example?



## APPENDIX C

### *Oral Consent to be a Research Subject*

**Title:** *Understanding Dating Relationships between Asian Women and White Men*

**Principal Investigator:** Amanda E. Lewis, Ph.D.

**Co-Investigator:** Sungeun Bae

#### **Introduction and Purpose**

You are being asked to participate in a research study which explores the experiences of Asian women in interracial relationships with white men. I chose you as a potential participant because you are an East or Southeast Asian women (either born in America or in Asia) who is currently dating or recently dated a white man. 20 Asian women will be interviewed for this study. This study is conducted for my honors thesis under the supervision of Dr. Amanda E. Lewis.

#### **Procedures**

You will be participating in a face-to-face interview with a researcher for about an hour. The interview will be held at a place that is most convenient to you. The interview questions will be about your experiences in and interracial relationship, reactions you have received from others about the relationship, and how you responded to these reactions. If given the permission, I will record the interview. During the interview you can stop the interview itself or stop the recording of the interview at any time for any reason.

#### **Risks and Discomforts**

We do not envisage there being any risks or discomforts during this interview but remind you that you may stop it at any time for any reason if you wish..

#### **Benefits**

There are no direct benefits to participating in this study. However, your participation can help the general public and Asian-white couples understand Asian-white couples better.

#### **Incentives**

There will be \$10 incentive for participating in the research project.

**Confidentiality**

Your confidentiality will be protected in the following way:

- 1) All recordings will be identified by code numbers only.
- 2) The e-mails I receive from the respondents will be deleted as soon as data is collected.
- 3) All data will be stored on password-protected computers.
- 4) Transcriptions will contain pseudonyms only in place of participants' names.

Please understand that Emory Institutional Review Board, Emory Office of Research Compliance, and government agencies may look at the study data. However, your name and other identifiable characteristics will be kept confidential when any findings from this research are presented in public or published.

**Questions**

Please do not hesitate to e-mail ([sbae6@emory.edu](mailto:sbae6@emory.edu) or [alewi22@emory.edu](mailto:alewi22@emory.edu)) or call (404-693-4872 or 404-727-7413) with any questions regarding this research study. In addition, you may contact the Emory Institutional Review Board with any questions regarding your confidentiality or rights as a participant to a research study ([irb@emory.edu](mailto:irb@emory.edu)) or call (404-712-0720 or 1-877-503-9797).

**Entitlement**

We will give you a copy of this consent form for your records if you would like one.

**Consent**

Do you agree to participate in the study? Your answering the interview questions I will ask will also signify that you consent to participate in this research project.