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"FOB" and "Whitewashed": Identity and Internalized Racism Among Second Generation Asian Americans

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An analysis of 184 in-depth interviews with grown children of Korean and Vietnamese immigrants finds that the racial beliefs, meanings, and stereotypes of the mainstream society shape how they think about coethnics, generate local identities, and deflect stigma from themselves. We examine the terms "FOB" ("Fresh Off the Boat") and "whitewashed" that were commonly deployed to denigrate coethnic "others" as "too ethnic" or "too assimilated" while casting those at the bicultural middle as the "normals." We describe how this system of "intraethnic othering" serves as a basis for sub-ethnic identities, intraethnic social boundaries, and the monitoring and control of social behavior. We draw on the concept of internalized racial oppression in framing our findings.

KEY WORDS: acculturation; Asian Americans; ethnic identity; internalized racism; second generation Americans.

INTRODUCTION

The post-1965 wave of immigration, dominated by streams of non-white newcomers, has expanded the numbers of racial/ethnic minorities in the U.S. The lifting of quotas on Asian immigrants along with the flood of Southeast Asian refugees has contributed to new Asian American ethnicities (Zhou 1999). Unlike earlier waves of European immigrants who gradually merged into the white majority, Asians have been racialized as "others" and excluded from the white mainstream (Espiritu 1992; Gans 1979; Waters 1990). Hence, straight-line assimilation theories that predict amalgamation into whiteness based on the adaptation processes of European immigrants and their children have had little success when applied to today's non-white immigrant groups. New approaches have been needed. Research

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on the "new second generation" has led to new models that consider a multiplicity of identities and acculturative pathways (Omi and Winant 1994; Portes and Zhou 1993; Rumbaut 1994; Tuan 1998; Zhou 1997).

Current models regard ethnic identity as dynamic, situational, multilayered and multidirectional (Nagel 1994). This social constructionist approach views the continual negotiation and delineation of social boundaries whereby individuals and groups are differentiated and labeled as central to the formation of ethnic identity (Barth 1969; Espiritu 1992; Kibria 1997; Nagel 1994; Smith 1991). As individuals move across various interactional contexts, the boundaries of social differences that shape identities shift, and multiple layers of identities are constructed. Different identities are enlisted or imposed depending on their symbolic appropriateness and strategic utility across the various situations and audiences encountered (Espiritu 1992; Nagel 1994, pp. 154–155). Take the case of Korean Americans. The national identity "American" is commonly deployed when on foreign soil, the racial identity "Asian American" is enlisted or imposed in interaction in the white-dominated U.S. mainstream, and a "Korean" or "Korean American" ethnic identity is commonly deployed among other Asian ethnics.

The ethnic identity literature has focused on these national, racial/pan-ethnic, and ethnic identities (Espiritu 1992; Gans 1992; Kibria 1997; Lee 1996; Portes and Zhou 1993; Rumbaut 1994; Tuan 1998; Waters 1994, 1996). However, ethnic identities are formed not only along borders with national, racial, and ethnic outsiders, but also along the internal boundaries that mark cultural struggles and differences within ethnic groups (Nagel 1994). Little research has focused on sub-ethnic identities, the social processes by which they are created, and the internal boundaries they reflect. We take these concerns as a starting point in our investigation of sub-ethnic identities among second generation Korean and Vietnamese Americans, the majority of whom, as members of relatively new immigrant groups, are still children or young adults. We examine the second generation because, unlike their parents, they evaluate themselves and construct identities in relation to the meanings and standards of the new society rather than the country of their parents' birth (Zhou 1999). Hence the task of defining what it means to be Korean American or Vietnamese American falls primarily to the second generation members of these still-emerging American ethnic groups.

Much of the extant literature, influenced by social psychology, regards ethnic identity as the psychic property of individuals, with attention focusing on the kinds of identities individuals select. However, identity is not merely a matter of individual choice but is the result of group processes (Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock 1996). As social devices that mark boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, identities are collectively constructed. In this study, we are less concerned with how individuals come to select certain identities for themselves than with the meanings and signifying practices of the sub-ethnic identities they collectively create.

Research on ethnic identity among today's second generation has focused on how specific identities indicate assimilation to some segment of American society or the retention of ethnicity. The aim is to document the cultural values, attitudes, and adaptational outcomes associated with different identity trajectories. Despite general acknowledgment that the non-white racial status of today's second generation contributes to adaptation patterns that differ tremendously from those of earlier white ethnics, little attention has been given to the impact of racial categories, meanings, and stereotypes on the ethnic identity of today's non-white second generation. The little research that has been conducted suggests the centrality of racial codes and meanings in the construction of ethnic identities. For example, though the identity "Asian American" was initially imposed by the dominant society, it has acquired personal and social salience among second generation Americans of various Asian ethnic groups due to the shared experience of anti-Asian racism and growing up outside the boundaries of whiteness (Espiritu 1992; Kibria 1997; Tuan 1998).

We examine the negative identity terms "FOB" (Fresh Off the Boat) and "whitewashed" that our young adult respondents most commonly deployed in their narratives to socially categorize and describe coethnic peers on different accultural trajectories. These negative identities were constructed around the racial stereotypes and assumptions perpetuated in the mainstream society and applied with derision to coethnics associated with the acculturative extremes. By denigrating coethnics as too ethnic ("FOB") or too assimilated ("whitewashed"), and assigning to them a wide range of negative traits including those ascribed to their racial/ethnic group, respondents attempt to carve out a non-stigmatized identity at the bicultural middle of the acculturative spectrum (Goffman 1963). The sub-ethnic identities "FOB" and "whitewashed" are an adaptive response to the racial oppression of the larger society. Although these identities are constructed as a means of resisting a racially stigmatized status, they also reproduce the derogatory racial stereotypes. In the next sections we describe the form of racism that Asian Americans face and the literature concerning the internalization and reproduction of racial oppression among subordinates, which we draw on in framing our analysis.

THE NATURE OF ANTI-ASIAN RACISM

The kind of racism Asian Americans experience is distinct from any other racial group. The subordinated racial status of Asian Americans is obscured by their relative valorization vis-à-vis blacks. They are commonly regarded as a model minority, based on an exaggeration of their overall educational and economic success (Kim 1999). Mainstream images of Asian Americans as hard workers and studious wizards of math and science dovetail with notions that they are disloyal,

socially dull, "nerdy," and inept with American culture. They are both praised and resented, complimented and derided. While the model minority myth is used to further denigrate African Americans, it also obscures the fact that Asian Americans are not honorary whites free from racial oppression (Tuan 1998). To the contrary, they have consistently occupied a stratified space between blacks and whites since the mid-1800s.

There has been a lack of research examining ethnic identity in relation to racial classification and meaning systems due, in part, to a tendency to define ethnicity and race as separate phenomena. Ethnicity usually refers to cultural practices and race to physical attributes. However, race and ethnicity are not easily disentangled, especially in the case of Asian Americans. Unlike African Americans, who endure many negative racial stereotypes but are not assumed to be other than "American," Asian Americans are racialized as unassimilable foreigners. They are not automatically seen as "American" and are often assumed to be non-English speakers, even when English is the only language they know. While their European American counterparts can elect an ethnic identity and, at the same time, claim membership in the larger white mainstream, later generation Asian Americans do not have similar ethnic options (Waters 1990). Despite being culturally assimilated, third and later generation Asian Americans are classified as "ethnic"—more Asian than American—and often assumed to be non-citizens (Tuan 1998).

Because they are racialized as super successful foreigners, Asian Americans are seen as a potential threat to U.S. security and the economic success of "real" Americans. As perceived outsiders, the nature of the racism and stereotypes they encounter are fused with anti-immigrant attitudes, which have grown stronger in recent years. Whether they are first or later generation Americans, Asian Americans can face distrust, hostility, and derision for their assumed disloyalty and lack of assimilation to the white mainstream. Such was the case when Ross Perot read a list of Asian American political donors and noted, "So far we haven't found an American name" (Nakao 1996). Asian American ethnic and sub-ethnic identities are constructed within this system of racial codes, stereotypes, and anti-immigrant attitudes.

INTERNALIZED RACISM AND THE REPRODUCTION OF INEQUALITY

Race scholars acknowledge that racism shapes the attitudes and subjectivities of everyone living within its cage, including the oppressed (Feagin 2000; Omi and Winant 1994). Yet research on racism's effects on the oppressed has focused on overt manifestations, like violence and discrimination. Far less attention has been given to the subtle processes by which racial inequality shapes the way that the oppressed think of themselves and other members of their group. By accepting and internalizing mainstream racist values and rationales, known as "sincere fictions"

(Essed 1991; Feagin and Vera 1995), subordinates, often without a conscious awareness of doing so, justify the oppression of their group with a belief in their own inferiority (Baker 1983).

Due to the discomfort, confusion, and embarrassment the subject raises, an intellectual taboo surrounds the study of internalized racism (Russell, Wilson, and Hall 1992). A major concern is that because internalized racism reveals dynamics by which oppression is reproduced, it will lead to blaming the victims and move attention away from the racist institutions and practices that privilege whites at the expense of people of color. Internalized racism also causes discomfort because it suggests that the effects of racism are deeper and broader than many would like to admit. As a result, it remains one of the least explained features of racism (Hall 1986, p. 27). The existing literature addresses some of these concerns by emphasizing that internalized racial oppression is a reaction to the forces of racism (Lipsky 1987), not a source of racism. As Schwalbe and his co-authors suggest (2000, p. 425), internalized oppression does not define into existence a group of exploitable others. Rather, it is an adaptive response. Nonetheless it is a form of compliance that replicates inequality. Resistance and compliance can be interrelated processes. Resistance to some aspect or level of racial oppression can result in the replication of another dimension of racism. The study of such contradictions in the way that subordinates respond to racism can forward our understanding of how the oppressed are brought into compliance and racial inequality is maintained.

Racial subordinates live under the constraints of racial categories, meanings, and stereotypes which effectively deny them the power of self-identity. Regardless of whether they construct identities that internalize or resist the racial ideology of the larger society, they are forced to define themselves in relation to racial schemas and meanings. Osajima (1993) refers to these dynamics as the "hidden injuries of race" in his study of the racial subjectivities of Asian American students at predominately white colleges in the Northeast. He found that the students relied heavily on the negative images that the dominant group had of Asians in forming their own everyday sense of self. They worried about how others saw them and took special efforts to distance themselves from the negative stereotypes by not appearing too Asian. As Goffman (1963, p. 44) explained, those who face stigmatization can resist by relying on "disidentifiers" that cast doubt on the validity of their stigmatized status. Hence Asian Americans can oppose being seen as perpetual foreigners and vie for acceptance by whites by expending much energy in the display of an assimilated status via language usage (e.g., speaking without an accent), clothing, attitudes, and behavior. In other words, Asian Americans face immense pressure to assimilate in order to distance themselves from the stigma associated with their racial group.

Disidentification and the display of an assimilated status also entails the distancing of oneself from coethnics. By displaying an assimilated status and denigrating "other" coethnics as "too ethnic" or too stereotypical, some Asian Americans

can carve out a positive self-identity. Osajima (1993) observed that, in attempting to gain acceptance among whites, some Asian American students avoided and expressed disgust toward coethnics, to whom they applied the negative stereotypes. Drawing on the work of those who have studied the effects of colonialism on the oppressed, Osajima suggests that this process of deflecting stigma by denigrating coethnic others and assigning to them the negative traits associated with the group is evidence of internalized racism. Schwalbe and his co-authors (2000, pp. 422, 425) refer to such dynamics as "defensive othering." Unlike "oppressive othering," whereby a dominant group marks another group as inferior through the use of classification schemes, myths, and stereotypes in the (re)creation of inequality, defensive othering is a type of identity work employed by subordinates who seek membership in the dominant group or attempt to distance themselves from the stigma linked to their status. Schwalbe and his co-authors cite several studies, including an investigation of Irish immigrants who construct positive self-identities by ridiculing and avoiding coethnics who seem to perpetuate the stereotype of Irish as obnoxious drunkards (Fields 1994). As they explain, "The process, in each case, involves accepting the legitimacy of a devalued identity imposed by the dominant group, but then saying, in effect, 'There are indeed Others to whom this applies, but it does not apply to me'" (2000, p. 425). By reacting to stereotypes in this way, subordinates reaffirm the dominant order and ideology as legitimate.

We use the more specific term "intraethnic othering" to describe the specific othering processes that occur among coethnics in subordinated groups. Because intraethnic othering involves the ridicule and isolation of some coethnics—usually the more ethnically-identified, by other coethnics, usually the more assimilated—it can generate resentment and resistance within the ethnic group. This can take the form of a collective sense of distrust among the more ethnically-identified toward assimilated coethnics who are derided for having "sold out" to the white mainstream. Ethnic traditionalists resist the anti-ethnic othering of the more assimilated by engaging in another form of othering that ridicules those who are not ethnic. This entails the use of ethnic authenticity tests to ascertain who is "one of us" and who has "sold out" (Anzaldúa 1993). Those who do not meet certain performative standards of ethnicity are shunned. These othering dynamics create a divide within the racial/ethnic group that falls along the acculturation continuum. This divide has social consequences, creating not only sub-ethnic identities, but forming distinct groups that rely on the materials of culture in defining, coding, and monitoring their differences so as to maintain boundaries. We find evidence of these intraethnic processes in respondents' use of the negative identities "FOB" and "whitewashed" to label coethnic others. In the sections that follow, we describe the meanings attached to these identities, their basis in the stereotypes and racial imagery of the dominant society, and how they are used to denigrate coethnics in a system of intraethnic othering. We then discuss how these identities maintain intraethnic boundaries and serve as the basis for monitoring and controlling social

behavior along acculturative lines. We suggest that these dynamics are evidence of internalized racial oppression.

We do not identify the precise processes by which racism has been internalized, such as respondents' contact with derogatory images of Asians in the mass society, face-to-face racist encounters, or accounts by others of experiences with racial discrimination. Such direct encounters are not necessary as racial understandings and stereotypes are pervasive in the dominant society and part of "commonsense" thought. Just as whites do not need contact with racial subordinates to develop racist attitudes, racial subordinates do not need prior experiences with overt racism in the dominant society to internalize racial assumptions and codes.

METHODS

Interview data were gathered between 1996 and 1998 from 184 grown children of Korean and Vietnamese immigrants in California. The data consist of 149 individual interviews and 14 group interviews with 48 respondents (group interviews ranged in size from 2 to 5; 14 respondents participated in both an individual and group interview). As indicated in Table I, of the 85 Korean Americans, 48 are women and 37 are men, and of the 99 Vietnamese Americans, 52 are women and 47 are men. The sample ranges in age from 18 to 34, with an average of 22 years. Respondents include the true second generation—those who were born in the U.S.—as well as those who immigrated prior to the age of 15, known as the 1.5 generation (Zhou 1999). As is common practice, we refer to both American-born and American-reared respondents as second generation. Those who immigrated did so at an average age of 5, and all lived in the U.S. during their adolescence. We did not include those who arrived as older adolescents or young adults—first generation immigrants—as we are interested in how sub-ethnic identities are collectively constructed among those who grew up under the influence of American racial codes and stigmatized racial identities. Thus our findings do

Table I. Sample Characteristics

	Korean	Vietnamese	Total
Gender			
Male	37	47	84
Female	48	52	100
Median Age	22	22	22
Born in the U.S. (%)	34	12	22
Education (%)			
College graduate	12	13	13
Currently attending college	66	69	68
High school or quit college before getting degree	22	17	20

not capture the sub-ethnic identity processes that occur among first generation immigrants. Of the Korean American respondents, 34 percent were born in the U.S. compared to only 12 percent of Vietnamese American respondents, with the remainder having arrived as immigrant children. These figures are in line with national patterns.

A convenience sample was located through published and personal announcements at several southern California universities, and by student research assistants, some of whom were directed to find respondents who were not university students. Twenty percent of our respondents never attended college or quit before attaining a degree, 13 percent are college graduates, and the majority (68 percent) are currently enrolled students, 30 percent of whom attend community colleges or technical schools. Of the Korean American respondents, 66 percent were students compared to 69 percent of Vietnamese American respondents. Most of the students were at schools with large Asian populations—half attended a university that is 58 percent Asian American, and others attended colleges where 40 percent of the students are Asian American (Hong 1998). Unlike Asian Americans growing up in geographic areas with fewer coethnics and attending predominately white universities, such as those Osajima (1993) studied, our California respondents have more opportunities to maintain strong ethnic ties (Kibria 1997; Thai 1999) and would thus seem to have more resources for resisting the negative racial imagery of the larger society in the construction of sub-ethnic identities.

The interview data are part of a larger ongoing research project. All 14 focus group interviews and 21 of the individual interviews were conducted by the first author. Student research assistants conducted 163 individual interviews after completion of extensive training. During the first wave of data collection, respondents were asked open-ended questions about family relations, their social experiences, and how they grappled with different cultural worlds. Taking a grounded research approach (Glaser and Straus 1967), we examined unanticipated themes that emerged in the data. In the narratives of the first 107 respondents, respondents repeatedly used the terms "FOB" and "whitewashed," usually to ridicule coethnics and to mark a contrast to their own acculturative location. The widespread negative use of these terms provoked our interest. We revised the interview guide to include new questions that focused specifically on the use of these terms and interviewed an additional 77 respondents. We asked whether they had ever heard the terms "FOB" and "whitewashed" used by others, to what extent and in what ways they have used these terms, to whom they have applied such terms and under what circumstances, how they have heard others use these terms, whether they have ever been called "FOB" or "whitewashed" by others, and their reactions to the use of these labels. We also asked respondents to describe specific incidences in which these terms were used. Our analysis focuses on the use of these identities as they were voluntarily deployed in the first 107 interviews as well as the responses provided by the last 77 respondents to our direct probes about these terms. The tape-recorded

interviews lasted from one to three hours. Transcribed interviews were coded into general thematic categories that became the basis for further analysis concerning the use and meaning of these terms. As our intent was to understand the collective construction of these identities, we did not analyze how individual respondents arrived at particular acculturative identities, the factors that contribute to different acculturative locations, or how individual identities shift across time. Rather, we focused on whether these terms were used to convey praise or derision so as to uncover the ideological assumptions guiding their use, and how the use of these terms reflected and contributed to the organization of coethnic social worlds.

We did not find any significant differences in how these terms were deployed among respondents of Vietnamese or Korean origin. Nor did we find any significant differences in the use of these identities linked to the amount of time respondents spent in the U.S. Those who immigrated in later childhood were just as likely to want to avoid being labeled "FOB" and to use it as a term of denigration as those who arrived much earlier. Respondents of varying educational levels and ages also applied the terms in similar ways. As educational attainment is an indicator of social class, this suggests that class has little effect on the meaning and application of these terms. Most respondents began using these terms in junior high or high school when sorting along racial/ethnic and acculturative boundaries became a more salient social practice (Olsen 1997) and continue to use them into adulthood. However, respondents who grew up in communities with few Asian Americans often did not know the meanings of these terms or learned of these identities upon coming into contact with large numbers of Asian Americans, typically on their college campus. Hence the sub-ethnic identity processes observed here would seem to apply only to those who live in regions with large numbers of Asian Americans. As our sample does not include anyone over 34 years of age, we cannot ascertain whether these identities will have social meaning in later stages of adulthood. Pseudonyms are used in presenting the data. We begin by discussing the meaning of these terms in the coethnic peer groups of our respondents, and then describe how they serve as mechanisms of social segregation, social control, and intraethnic othering.

"FOB," "WHITEWASHED," AND THE BICULTURAL MIDDLE

We examine the identities "FOB" and "whitewashed" as symbolic devices used to create meaning, mark and maintain internal social boundaries, and control social behavior among coethnic peers. Although we provide definitions of these terms in explaining how they were used by respondents, they are fluid and dynamic ideological concepts rather than real objects. There is no individual to whom we can point and say, "That person is a 'real' FOB" or "That is a 'real' whitewashed person." In fact, because these identities describe and socially categorize coethnic

peers based on their perceived acculturative location, the application of these identities reveals more about the labelers than it does about the people to whom the labels are applied. Despite the shifting and subjective nature with which these identities were applied, we are able to provide broad categorical definitions and specific identifiers based on reiterative patterns in the data.

The same material out of which ethnicity is constructed—language, appearance, behavioral customs, culture—is used to construct sub-ethnic identities. "FOB" is applied to those who display any of several ethnic identifiers such as speaking accented English, speaking Korean or Vietnamese with peers, engaging in behavior and leisure pursuits associated with newer arrivals or ethnic traditionalists, dressing in styles associated with the homeland or ethnic enclaves, or socializing with recently immigrated coethnics or ethnic traditionalists. Accent and foreign language were particularly important markers of the "FOB," reflecting the centrality of language in ethnicization processes and the tendency of anti-Asian discrimination to center around language and accent (Lippi-Green 1997).

"Whitewashed," on the other hand, was used to describe those who have assimilated to the white mainstream and retain few ethnic practices. They are described as those who cannot or refuse to speak Korean or Vietnamese with peers, have many non-Asian friends (especially white friends, but having Latino and black friends could also prompt this label), date non-Asians, behave and dress in ways associated with whites, or are unfamiliar with ethnic customs. Diane explained, "My Korean friends call me 'whitewashed.' I think they say that because I like to eat more American foods, and I like white guys and I dress like Americans." By "American" respondents typically mean whites of European descent, a widespread practice among first and second generation racial/ethnics reflecting racialized notions of Asian Americans as perpetual foreigners who can never truly be American (Espiritu 2000; Pyke 2000; Olsen 1997; Tuan 1998). The coding of "real" Americans as white exemplifies the internalization of the dominant racial ideology. "Whitewashed" has several synonyms including "banana" and "Twinkie," which refer to being "yellow on the outside and white on the inside," along with "bleached" and "sell-out." "Whitewashed" was used most frequently and is thus the term we use here.

"FOB" and "whitewashed" capture acculturative variation that is associated with the second generation. These terms were not used to describe first generation parents who are viewed as monolithically traditional and lacking acculturative agency. Although "FOB" and "whitewashed" are widely used in the ethnic peer groups of respondents, they are little-used terms among non-Asian peers. As Gang observed, "A lot of my non-Asian friends don't know the term 'FOB . . .' It's always my Asian friends who call me [FOB or whitewashed].[2] There were some

[2]In an informal classroom poll conducted by the first author at the university where this research occurred, almost all of the non-Asian American students reported they were unfamiliar with the term "FOB," while all or nearly all of the Asian American students said they knew the term.

respondents who view all coethnic peers as being either a "FOB" or "whitewashed." Most, however, view those who fall in the middle of the continuum as bicultural, balancing Americanization with an ethnic identity. The negative identities at the accullturative extremes cast the bicultural middle as a safe, non-stigmatized zone occupied by the "normals" (Goffman 1963), which is where most respondents who claimed a self-identity said they belonged. Ann explained, "Everyone wants to be like somewhere in the middle. No one wants to be a FOB and no one wants to be whitewashed." There was no clear identity label used by respondents to describe the bicultural middle, which was a vague and shifting space. Biculturals were defined by what they are not: neither a "FOB" nor "whitewashed." As Theresa, 23, a U.S-born Korean American, said:

> I don't think I'm a FOB, no way. I've lived here way too long to look like a foreigner. I don't think I'm whitewashed either because I don't totally forget where I came from. I don't deny my race. I'm not ashamed to say that I'm Korean. There is a middle ground in between being Korean and white and that's where I think I am. I can identify with Koreans and other Asians but I can also identify with whites.

The ambiguity of the bicultural middle, with its lack of clear cultural markers or identifiers, and the subjectivity with which identities are applied mean bicultural individuals can be labeled "whitewashed" or "FOB," depending on the standpoint of the labeler. Zeke, 25, explained: "Someone can see me out in the street and call me a FOB because I don't [measure] up to their standard. And to others I can be whitewashed. I guess it is all in a different perspective." As respondents rely on the labels "FOB" and "whitewashed" to construct and affirm their own sub-ethnic identity, they vary in their assessment of whether these labels capture a desired or derogated status. The most assimilated tend to regard "whitewashed" as a favorable identity and "FOB" as derogatory. The more ethnically-identified tend to deride the "whitewashed" for forgetting their roots and being under the illusion that they can actually join the white race. They tend to be a little more sympathetic toward those labeled "FOBs" but still avoid using the label to refer to themselves, even when acknowledging that others label them that way. While they assume a stance of resistance to derogations of ethnic immigrant culture, they still did not provide positive descriptions of the "FOB." The majority of respondents who fall in the bicultural middle regard both "FOB" and "whitewashed" as derogatory identities, which they relied on in constructing a positive self-identity as biculturals.

The bicultural middle is a site of constant accommodation. It is a place where individuals can claim an ethnic or an Americanized identity as the situation requires in order to avoid stigma and criticism, without challenging the larger racial order. Biculturals retain a link to their ethnicity and acknowledge that, as Asian Americans, they can never join the white world. They charge those who attempt to do so, the so-called "whitewashed," as deluding themselves. They assume essential differences between whites and Asians, and that as non-whites Asians can

never really be “American.” Hence they regard racial/ethnic distinctions as immutable. This view complies with the racial classification schema and ideology of the dominant society that mark Asians as forever ethnically distinct from whites. In this particular instance, the biculturals are allied with ethnic traditionalists who likewise denigrate the whitewashed for ignoring their ethnicity. However, unlike ethnic traditionalists, biculturals also claim a comfort and ease with mainstream American culture and an ability to also “identify with whites.” It is here that they criticize ethnic traditionalists and the newly arrived, the so-called “FOBs,” for their inability or unwillingness to participate in the white-dominated mainstream. In this particular instance the biculturals are in compliance with the white hegemony and form a temporary alliance with more assimilated coethnics, the so-called “whitewashed.” The bicultural middle thus provides a constantly shifting site of accommodation and resistance vis-á-vis the white-dominated mainstream and the ethnic subculture. The production and affirmation of a bicultural identity depend on intraethnic othering, or the labeling of others as “FOB” or “whitewashed.” We focus on this identity process, and next provide an in-depth discussion of the meanings of these negative terms.

“FOB”: “Many People Make Fun of Them”

Despite repeated claims that “FOB” was an innocuous “descriptive term,” most respondents used it to ridicule the ethnically traditional, and in so doing mimicked the contempt expressed in the dominant culture toward ethnic immigrants. Respondents were aware that the “nerd” is a stereotype that majority Americans commonly apply to Asian Americans, based on “model minority” depictions of Asian Americans as exceptionally bright, hard-working, and high-achieving (Kibria 1999; Zhou and Bankston 1998). However, they rarely challenged this stereotype. Instead, it was reiterated in their construction of the “FOB,” whose ignorance of American culture and intense study habits make him or her “nerdy.” It was with laughter and sheepish smirks that respondents described “FOBs” in comical terms as ignorant of American culture, befuddled in their social interactions, and embarrassingly deficient in style. We repeatedly heard respondents describe “FOBs” in the following way: “FOBs wear funny clothes, all outdated and they don’t match. They can’t speak English well, so many people make fun of them for that. They try to fit in and be American, but the more they try, the more ridiculous they look” (Theresa, 23). “FOB” not only described the newcomer but also those coethnics, including the U.S.-born, who embrace an ethnic identity. These acculturated but unassimilated coethnics are also referred to as “the typical Asian,” which was used interchangeably with “FOB” to label those who dress in a style associated with the youth culture of their ethnic group, socialize only with coethnics, and frequent ethnic nightclubs and cafes. Penelope, 21, explained: “Because I hang around so many white people I don’t think I am really that typical

Asian girl. You know, you have that skinny, trendy Asian girl who wears like big heels to school and little tops." The terms "Bolsa girl" and "Bolsa boy," which refer to Bolsa Avenue, the main boulevard of Orange County's "Little Saigon," were also used by Vietnamese American respondents synonymously with "the typical Asian" and "FOB." Doug, 24, offered a description:

> When I see a girl FOB . . . my friends and me call them the Bolsa girls . . . they always wear their dressy black shoes and black slacks and they won't dress up with tennis shoes or sweats. They always have to be trendy and proper. Even though they are skinny, they are not fit. They don't want to tan because if you are tan back in Vietnam it means you have been working in the field. Whitewashed girls here like to get tan.

The so-called "typical Asians" include those who are gangsters or gangster-like in appearance, as well as the girlfriends of gangsters who are assumed to be sexually promiscuous. The category "FOB" imports from the mainstream and unites contradictory stereotypes of Asian masculinity—the wimpy nerd and the hypermasculine gangster—as well as Asian femininity—the unattractive, nonsexual nerd and the highly erotic female. "FOB" also captures class differences. Several described the wimpy nerd as a successful student bound for a well-paying job in medicine, science, or technology (the "model minority" Asian American), and the "typical Asian" as a working-class gangster (often jobless), hanging out in the cafes and pool halls of ethnic enclaves or driving a customized car with a lowered axle. The internal inconsistency of the category "FOB" is due to its broad construction as the repository of all negative notions of Asian Americans perpetuated in the dominant society. The creation of such a general category within the local ethnic culture enables individuals to distance themselves from the derogatory images by denigrating others as the real "FOBs." By mocking coethnics in this way, respondents make clear that there are others to whom this stereotype applies, but not themselves. In so doing, they emerge as non-stigmatized "normals."

Respondents defended the social use of "FOB" by arguing that it is merely a descriptive term used mostly in a joking manner, even while acknowledging that it would be regarded as racist if used by non-Asians. Because the construction of "FOB" incorporates negative racial images and anti-immigrant attitudes from the mainstream, it was surprising that its usage went largely uncontested, particularly given the educational levels of most respondents and their residence in or near communities with high numbers of Asian Americans. Only a few respondents stated that they do not use "FOB" because of its derogatory implication. Yet they admit to having used the term in junior high and high school, and typically still use it as a concept in silently judging others. Carol, 21, who is frequently called a "FOB," said, "I don't call people 'FOB.' I never use that term but I can tell . . . I just keep it in my mind." So even though she doesn't speak the word, Carol still uses it as an organizing concept in her interactions with others. The large-scale acceptance of "FOB" is further evident by its unremarked appearance in Asian American scholarship and journalism (e.g., Hagedorn 1994, p. 178; Pham 1995).

Respondents genuinely felt a sense of shame, embarrassment, disgust, and discomfort toward those to whom they applied the term. Few respondents referred to themselves as "FOBs," and rarely with a sense of pride. Several who share characteristics associated with "FOBs," such as those who immigrated as older children, spoke in heavily accented English, and socialize mostly with coethnics, nonetheless referred to "FOBs" as "them" rather than "us." "FOB" was far less likely to be used as a self-identification label than "whitewashed," an identity that some claimed with great pride. That "FOB" was a more widely stigmatized status than "whitewashed" suggests our second generation sample was highly acculturated to the hierarchical racial/ethnic order of the white-dominated mainstream. Further, the denigration of the "FOB" was bolstered by the weight of the entire mainstream culture, which was not the case with the term "whitewashed." As we discuss next, "whitewashed" was constructed out of resistance to the racist, pro-assimilation forces of the mainstream, but did not always have a negative connotation.

"Whitewashed": "They Deny Their Culture"

Unlike the term "FOB" whose derogatory meaning was largely uncontested among respondents, the use of the term "whitewashed" was more varied. The more assimilated often regard "whitewashed" as a positive status that indicates their success at being seen as "American" despite the racial stigma that codes them as perpetually ethnic. Ethnic traditionalists as well as the biculturals, on the other hand, use the label to derogate those who have assimilated, "forgotten their roots," and express disgust toward more traditional coethnics. The "whitewashed" are particularly criticized for trying to join the white society, as the following examples illustrate:

> Someone who is whitewashed leaves their culture behind and takes on the role of a white person in society. Maybe they act too white. They try to talk like white people, saying "dude" and "like" a lot. They dress like surfers and dye their hair blonde (Teresa, 23).

> Whitewashed people would dye their hair, wear baggy pants, wear contact lenses to make their eyes look blue or green . . . They deny their culture and they are acting because no matter how long they lived in the United States, they are still Vietnamese and they can't be Americans (Hue, 19).

The "whitewashed" are thought to be ashamed of their race and ethnicity. They try to fit into Euro-American culture in order to appear "cool" and improve their social status. In fact, one respondent described "FOBs" as "geeks" and "whitewashed" as "hip." Similarly, Jane, 23, explained, "Someone I would call a whitewashed person thinks about putting up a cool front. They would rather do that than speak Korean and be embarrassed."

While several assimilated respondents acknowledged limits to their ability to merge into white society or lamented a limited knowledge of their ethnic language

and culture, others expressed pride in being "whitewashed." Todd, 18, is an example. He telegraphed his assimilated status with a baseball cap worn backwards and colloquialisms associated with white youth, such as the word "dude." Like several other respondents, Todd said, "I actually take it as a compliment when people call me 'whitewashed.'" In seeking affirmation from the white interviewer that he is indeed "whitewashed," Todd listed interests in surfing, basketball, and skateboarding. Pointing to his "skate shoes," he proudly added, "You see Caucasian kids dressed like this, but you rarely see Asians dressed like this. Right? Isn't that true?" In expressing a similar pride, Pamela, 21, more explicitly reveals notions of white superiority. She said:

> I don't really mind being called whitewashed. I feel that it's a compliment in some ways 'cause that shows that my friends see me as one of them. I feel like part of the white race or something. I'm not saying that Koreans are bad but it seems that to be white is to be the best.

The pride that the assimilated express in their distance from their ethnic group and the higher status they associate with whites were a source of resentment among coethnics who regard the "whitewashed" as agents of racism within the ethnic community. As Miles, 20, stated:

> I think it is bad when some Asians who get whitewashed . . . place themselves, . . . above Asians. They almost have the attitude, "I made it because now I'm hanging out with this crew. You guys aren't as good as me."

The resentment that bicultural and ethnically traditional individuals expressed toward the "whitewashed" was not only for assimilating the white culture, but also for actively engaging in the dominant culture's disdain for their racial/ethnic group. In this instance, labeling and denigrating the "whitewashed" was a strategy of resisting racism and pro-assimilation pressures. Respondents also criticize the "whitewashed" for acting against their presumed ethnic "nature" by thinking they can become white, when they clearly cannot. In this instance, respondents essentialize ethnic distinctions, thereby implying that the otherwise symbolic reality of group differences is rooted in a natural order (Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock 1996, pp. 139–140). In so doing they reaffirm, rather than resist, mainstream notions that mark Asians as forever ethnic and unable to join white society and be truly "American." Hence the use of the term "whitewashed" to denigrate the assimilated is contradictory, revealing resistance to mainstream beliefs that denigrate Asian ethnicity on the one hand, but complying with mainstream notions that Asians are forever ethnic and unable to be truly "American" on the other. Some respondents who criticized the "whitewashed" for believing they can merge into the white world described their own earlier attempts to blend into the majority society only to be blocked by white peers who emphasized their racial distinction, often with slurs. Their experiences with racial labeling seem to contribute to their view that full assimilation is impossible and the maintenance or reclamation of an ethnic identity is necessary for social belonging. Similarly, Rumbaut (1994) found

that children of immigrants who have experienced discrimination are less likely to identify as American. By ridiculing those who attempt to merge into the mainstream and mocking their attempts as futile, respondents transfer their bitterness at the larger racial system to those coethnics who assume they can defy it.

THE SOCIAL GEOGRAPHY OF ACCULTURATION: "WE'RE OSTRACIZED BY OUR OWN PEOPLE"

When asked how they used the terms "FOB" and "whitewashed," respondents repeatedly replied in the following ways:

> That's how I describe them, like if I'm talking to my family [I'll say], "You know John, he's kind of whitewashed, the surfer." Or at church there are a lot of FOBs and I'll say, "Oh ya, you know the Fobby guy." "Oh ya, I know him" (Miles, 20).
>
> When I am in my own clique I constantly use those terms, but not in a negative or positive way. It is just a category that I would place a certain person in (Zeke, 25).
>
> I go shoot pool a lot and there is a big mixed crowd and my friends would point out a girl and say, "Hey, check out that babe." I might say, "Ahh, she's a little bit too FOBish" (Long, 23).
>
> Mostly I'll just think it in my head, you know, like "That girl is whitewashed" (Mimi, 21).

"FOB" and "whitewashed" compose a classificatory scheme by which coethnic peers identify each other as similar or different. These categories mark not only symbolic boundaries but also interactional boundaries that are internally maintained. As Kim, 20, observed: "If you see a person you consider . . . whitewashed and a FOB person dating, that's a very rare exception. I think there's a vivid distinction between the two groups, and they don't usually date or go out." Hoang, 22, explained that Vietnamese Americans at her high school composed two cliques that spoke different languages and did not mingle. She said, "Whenever the two [groups] come together, one would call the one 'FOBish' and one would call the other 'whitewashed.' And that was the clash between them and there would always be fights between them." Similar intraethnic rifts based on acculturative differences were found among Latino high school students in a recent police study in a southern California community. Derogatory slurs like "wetback" were used and tension led to fights and gang membership (Obsatz 2001). While conflicts such as these are more likely in high school environments than in work and university settings, our older respondents also use these terms. It is unclear from our data, however, whether these terms will continue to be relevant in middle adulthood.

The social boundaries dividing "FOB" and "whitewashed" were so marked that some respondents referred to friendship with coethnics from the other side of the acculturative tracks as evidence of diversity in their social network. Others avoid those who are different due to feelings of discomfort. Mee-Sun, 22, who described herself as having been "a big banana" in high school because "I just

wanted to be white," explained that she will never be "best friends" with her cousin, who is a "FOB." "We're just too different. I don't feel comfortable. Most of my friends that I'm close to have assimilated with the culture. They know what's up." Elizabeth, 19, whose brothers call her "whitewashed," segregates herself from those who are more ethnic because she doesn't fit in. She recounted her cousin's birthday party where the more ethnically-identified guests were dressed

> . . . like typical Asian girls. Like they were all in their black pants, cute little tops and everything. I came in my blue jeans, my [Doc Marten shoes], my T-shirt, had no make-up on, big ponytail, had a baseball cap on. Like I only stayed ten minutes at her birthday. I felt so out of place because I was wearing my whitewashed clothes and I wasn't wearing what the other girls were wearing. I felt really, really awkward so I left.

Some avoid social contact across acculturative boundaries because such an association causes unease and an adjustment in their behavior. Alexa, 19, said, "FOB . . . I don't have anything against them but if I'm with them I'm more quiet because they would be like freaked out if I acted like I normally do. I'm a blunt outspoken person." Respondents also described a sense of rejection and intimidation from those on the other side of the acculturative divide, causing them to feel unwelcome. Norbert, 24, said he doesn't socialize with coethnic peers because "I just don't fit in with them. I think I act too white for them because they say that I'm totally whitewashed. So even if I wanted to hang out with friends of my race, I don't think they would accept me." Similarly Thuy, 20, said:

> With people who have been here only a short time, they kind of look at me as a sell-out, someone who has lost their roots. But the people who have been here for a long period of time or the same amount of time that I have, I get along with them and we share a lot in common. We're ostracized by our own people because we don't speak Vietnamese as well as they do.

The symbolic boundary separating acculturative differences also affected the degree of welcome and comfort some respondents reported feeling in campus ethnic groups and their motivation to join. Thanh, 22, got information at a display table for a Vietnamese student group at her university but never attended a meeting. She explained:

> I was afraid that they would think of me as being too whitewashed and not good enough for them so I never went back . . . They gave me that "I'm better than you" look, you know, when people look down on you.

Hoa, 19, described very different dynamics in a Vietnamese student organization at another university, in which she holds a high-ranking office:

> I've noticed there is a lot of intra-racial prejudice . . . because although they say they're open to everybody, they tend to hang around more of the Americanized ones than hang out with the FOBs. That disturbs me.

The interactional and spatial boundaries captured by the terms "FOB" and "whitewashed" reveal a social geography of acculturation. Just as racial groups

create a "social geography of race" (Frankenberg 1993), we find intraethnic acculturative identities form the basis for a social geography of acculturation. Coethnics carefully observe one another's clothing styles, language usage, friendship choices, and leisure interests as they telegraph the acculturative identities by which peers are segregated into social groups. By avoiding contact with acculturative "others," a social geography is maintained. This social segregation undermines a strong collective identity and the construction of broadly inclusive ethnic organizations in which responses to the racism and anti-immigrant stances of the larger society could be mobilized. Thus the social geography of acculturation weakens the potential for broad-based collective strategies of resistance. As we discuss next, the social geography of acculturation is also an important mechanism in the day-to-day construction and reaffirmation of individual identity.

USING SOCIAL DISTANCE TO AFFIRM ASSIMILATED AND BICULTURAL IDENTITIES: "I'M JUST SO NOT LIKE YOU"

Because coethnics of different acculturative status share physical features that mark them as members of the same racial/ethnic group, a primary mechanism for signifying their acculturative location is through the maintenance of a social geography of acculturation. Whereas ethnic distinctions are largely presumed to be racial in origin, the erection of intraethnic boundaries reconstructs ethnic distinctions along acculturative rather than racial lines. This is a task that meets constant challenge from the dominant racial ideology which ascribes internal ethnic homogeneity to Asian ethnics and does not easily acknowledge those who have assimilated. Some respondents described interactions with non-Asian Americans who assumed that they were newcomers to the U.S. and didn't speak English when, in fact, they were born in the U.S. and English is the only language in which they are fluent. Assimilated and bicultural Asian Americans are required to invest great effort in constructing an identity that defies the racialized categories and derogatory assumptions of the mainstream that cast them as foreigners.

Intraethnic othering was a strategy by which several respondents conveyed their assimilated or bicultural identity. They described a constant pressure to produce and reaffirm their identity by socially distancing themselves from coethnics, particularly those who are more ethnic. Joe, 24, recalled with regret joining a Japanese American friend's ridicule of a less assimilated coethnic so as to avoid being identified as a "FOB":

> We had just gone to the mall and there was this guy who couldn't speak English at all. My friend started making fun of him [because] this guy sounded dumb. But the thing is that guy was Korean, and instead of helping the guy out, I just stood there and laughed with my friend. That really sucked, but I didn't want to seem . . . I don't know. Inside it made me mad at what my friend was saying, but at the same time I was Americanized so that I didn't want to seem like I was a FOB too. I guess I thought that if I would've defended that guy then my friend wouldn't think I'm cool . . . That sucks but shit like that happens sometimes and

> you feel bad and you don't want to say anything so you let the guy feel stupid and helpless. Better him than you.

In the following case the construction of an assimilated identity that centered on social association with whites created a social boundary that cut across family. Jack, 21, recalls avoiding his recently arrived cousin who attended the same high school:

> When I'd see him, I just looked at him, made eye contact in an unfriendly way, say "Hi." That was really bad. He was a blood relative. I shouldn't have done that. But I did that because he's a FOB and I don't associate with Vietnamese even though I'm Vietnamese. I'm Americanized. I just hang around white people and white people were my crowd and that was in and that was hip. I'm totally whitewashed. If I had Vietnamese friends, they were whitewashed too. But as far as FOBs, [I] didn't acknowledge them.

As was the case in Osajima's (1993) study of Asian Americans at predominately white colleges, some of our more assimilated respondents avoided all coethnics so as to be seen as fully Americanized. Hannah, 19, who vehemently rejects a Vietnamese identity, uses the pronouns "I" and "they" to distance herself from other Vietnamese Americans. She said:

> My last name is Vietnamese and that's it. My physical features are Vietnamese but I don't know too much about the culture. I'm not fluent in the language. I'm just not involved with the community. I don't feel I identify with them. I identify more with American. Everything that I do I feel like it's not Vietnamese or not traditional. English is my first language. None of my friends are Vietnamese. I've noticed like in high school all the Vietnamese people were like FOBs. I mean, how else can I describe them but FOBs? They all speak Vietnamese, the way they dress. The Vietnamese people were very, very different because their parents were so strict. A lot of girls could not go to the prom, they couldn't go to movies because their parents wouldn't let them. For me, I felt like I'm so different from you. I didn't feel like I thought the same way they did. We had different values. It's just that we saw the world through different points of view. The things that they laugh about I don't think are funny and the things that I laugh about they don't think are funny.

Although Hannah suggests that she avoided coethnic peers due to cultural differences, she later reveals that such avoidance was a strategy in the construction of her identity. She explained:

> I didn't want to be Vietnamese because all of the Vietnamese people I saw, I'm just kind of like, "I'm not you, so I don't want to be associated with you. And if that's all that you are, and that's what everybody thinks Vietnamese is, then I'm really not Vietnamese because I'm just so not like you."

By distancing herself from other Vietnamese, Hannah suggests that the negative images of Vietnamese perpetuated in the majority culture do not apply to her. She reveals that her perceptions have been shaped by the internalization of derogatory notions of her ethnic group. Asked about those stereotypes, Hannah views coethnics as confirmatory examples. She said:

> It doesn't bother me because a lot of the Vietnamese people I've seen are like that, at least from my high school. That's why I believed it so I didn't want to be a part of it. I didn't want to be associated with that.

As these cases illustrate, the assimilated and biculturals rely on intraethnic othering and the social borders they generate to telegraph their cultural affiliation with the white-dominated mainstream. Border crossing carries the risk of being misidentified and denigrated as a "FOB," or a foreigner, and having one's Americanized status go unrecognized. In fact, the assimilated were more likely than the ethnically traditional to describe the risks of border crossing as shame, embarrassment, and downward social mobility. This mirrors the racial hierarchy of the larger society, with higher status accorded those who are aligned with whites. As Elizabeth, 19, noted:

> People who are like FOBs . . . they're rooted in their ethnic or cultural baggage that they carry from their other country and so they kind of want to maintain that Vietnamese purity. Whereas people who are like whitewashed, to associate with someone that's a FOB would be like losing ground that you've already made. You're like stepping backwards.

In explaining why the more assimilated want to maintain a distance from ethnic-traditionals, Kimberly, 21, also suggests that progress is associated with moving from a "FOB" to "whitewashed." She said:

> I guess once they pass that stage of being called a "FOB" they don't want to turn back and be associated with the people they consider a "FOB." It's hard for them to go back to being a "FOB" and having people judge you like that.

The data presented in this section further illustrate how the adoption of mainstream cultural values can involve the internalization and reproduction of derogatory racial images of the ethnic group. In seeking to disassociate from those negative images, the more assimilated, including biculturals, reiterate the mainstream disdain for the "foreigner" and the ethnic traditionalist and create a symbolic boundary between "them" and "us." In so doing, they communicate a commonality with the white majority. Since the dominant society does not readily recognize Asian Americans as culturally American, they are required to expend great energy in the construction of an identity that defies racial assumptions.

MONITORING AND CONTROLLING SUB-ETHNIC BEHAVIOR: "YOU'LL LOOK LIKE A 'FOB' IF YOU WEAR THAT"

As the construction of an individual identity depends greatly upon the identity of peers, much effort is exerted to ensure that peers conform with sub-ethnic identity codes. The word "FOB" is often directed "jokingly" at friends or siblings who have spoken incorrectly or dress in a particular style. For the most part respondents report the use of labels in such contexts as innocuous and having no effect on the behavior of others. However, such "jokes" are also methods of communicating what is and is not appropriate behavior for members of one's social group and acculturative identity. Once stigmatized as "FOB" or "whitewashed" some respondents made special efforts to adjust their behavior so as to correct their alleged failing (see

Goffman 1963). Todd reported successfully dissuading a friend from buying a shirt by saying, “Oh my God, you’ll look like a FOB if you wear that.” Many respondents described calling friends “FOB” when they spoke their ethnic language, thereby reminding them that only English will be tolerated in their social group. As a result, there are fewer opportunities to practice their parents’ native language, contributing to an erosion of language skills and a greater social distance from non-English-speaking coethnics. Some of those labeled “whitewashed,” on the other hand, were prompted to learn more about ethnic customs or language and engaged in more intraethnic sociability. Long, 23, said, “I’m too whitewashed. I heard that from someone first and then I would tell myself, well, maybe I am. That’s why I brushed up on my Vietnamese.”

The labels “sell-out” or “whitewashed” were leveled at those who socialize outside of their ethnicity. The most extreme examples involved those who dated non-Asians. Tan, 22, recalls that in his high school:

> When we were in our Vietnamese groups, if we saw someone that was too whitewashed, all the Vietnamese would say, “Oh that kid is too whitewashed.” I remember these two girls had their lockers burned because they were thought of as being too whitewashed. They were going out with other guys, Hispanic, and a lot of kids didn’t like it [emphasis added].

In this case, assigning the derogatory label “whitewashed” identified those against whom more radical action was taken. Most cases, however, were like the following, where ridicule from peers led individuals to retreat from socializing across sub-ethnic and racial boundaries. Sam, 25, recalled his desire to rush a fraternity in college. “But when I told my Korean friends about it I was called a ‘sell-out’ and ‘Twinkie’ and ‘banana.’ I mean, what was the big deal. . .? But I let them influence me and I never rushed.” Similarly, Matteo, 20, recalls, “Someone pointed it to my attention that I wasn’t hanging around with my own race—calling me a sell-out.” When he approached the Vietnamese Club table at a school fair he said he was asked:

> “What are you doing here? You’re not Vietnamese!” I was like, “I don’t understand what you’re talking about. Both my parents are Vietnamese and I speak Vietnamese, so how can you be saying shit like that?” So that was like my turning point. [Now] I am more conscious of my ethnicity.

The maintenance of coded behavior is an ongoing task in peer groups organized around a particular acculturative identity. By warning those who socialize across the divide, engage in ambiguous behavior, or give performances that signify an acculturative identity other than that associated with the peer group, group members ensure the construction of a clearly differentiated sub-ethnic identity. This collective identity work produces the appearance of real and essential distinctions between “FOBs” and “whitewashed.” Thus the internally maintained social geography of acculturation is made to look like a naturally occurring process.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This study elucidates the collective processes by which the racial beliefs and derogatory stereotypes of the dominant society shape sub-ethnic identity formation among the offspring of new racial/ethnic immigrants. Although the construction of the identities "FOB" and "whitewashed" involves somewhat different "othering" dynamics, both are constructed as an adaptive response to the racial oppression of the larger society. By discrediting coethnics who either confirm stereotypes of Asians as unassimilable or defy racial categories by attempting to merge into white society, a bicultural identity emerges that deflects stigma and defines the "normals." This process of intraethnic othering is an attempt to resist a racially stigmatized status; however it does so by reproducing racial stereotypes and a belief in essential racial and ethnic differences between whites and Asians. As these dynamics suggest, the nature of racial inequality, and the many dimensions by which it is culturally and structurally constituted, makes it difficult for subordinates to construct strategies of resistance that do not also entail some aspect of compliance. As we have previously argued, this should in no way be understood to mean that the oppressed have a hand in creating their oppression.

Asian Americans are racialized as a homogenous group of perpetual foreigners with in-group acculturative variation ignored in the racial ordering of the larger society. This creates dissonance for the assimilated and biculturals, forcing them to devise social mechanisms for projecting their Americanized identity. By denigrating the traits and practices of the more ethnically traditional, assigning to them the derogatory stereotypes associated with their racial/ethnic group, and deriding their lack of Americanization, the assimilated and biculturals can distance themselves from the negative stereotypes and construct themselves as distinct and superior. In affirming their Americanized status and avoiding the stigma of perpetual foreigners, these respondents shun the so-called "real FOBs," and sometimes coethnics in general, who are treated as social "untouchables" as social contact can lead to being similarly stigmatized. The shame and embarrassment that ethnic traditionalists inspire indicate the internalization of the racial and anti-immigrant biases of the mainstream.

While the label "FOB" clearly captures dynamics of internalized racism, the application of the term "whitewashed" was more varied and contradictory. Several assimilated respondents used the term to proudly self-identify as an accepted member of white society, suggesting that their identification with whites signaled progress and superiority over their traditional coethnic peers. In this instance individuals employed the term "whitewashed" to resist being identified with the negative racial stereotypes while simultaneously reaffirming those stereotypes as valid descriptors of "other" coethnics. Hence this usage is marked by both resistance and internalized oppression. Ethnic traditionalists and the biculturals, on the other hand, used "whitewashed" to attack the assimilated for their denigration of ethnic culture and coethnics and their stance of superiority over the less

assimilated. In this instance, "whitewashed" was used to resist internalized racism. Those who ridicule the so-called "whitewashed" also criticize them for believing they can merge into the white mainstream and become "American." Hence they implicitly assume that assimilation is (racially) impossible for Asian ethnics, and that they are "naturally" and inevitably culturally distinct from white Americans. In this instance, the biculturals and ethnic traditionalists reiterate the reified racial categories of the larger society that construct Asians and whites as forever racially and socially distinct. That is, this mode of resistance does not go so far as to resist the larger racial categories that serve as the basis of racial oppression, but rather reaffirms those categories as legitimate. We suggest that strategies of resistance that do not wrestle with core assumptions and meaning systems on which oppression is based, such as racial schemas and a belief in essential racial differences, reproduce those fundamental aspects of the oppressive order.

The othering processes we examined are the basis for distinct intraethnic collectivities that are at times locked into antagonistic stances. This contributes to a social geography of acculturation by which sub-ethnic identities are produced and reaffirmed. Intraethnic social distinctions are further maintained by monitoring and policing the social behavior of coethnic peers. Those who stray outside the boundaries of behavior and social interaction associated with their accculturative identity risk being misidentified or chastised by peers. By minimizing border crossing and maintaining clear behavioral distinctions, acculturative identities are clearly signified. This intraethnic segregation mimics the racial segregation of the larger society by reconstructing difference along acculturative rather than racial boundaries.

We provided less description of the bicultural middle, even though it is a widely claimed identity. However, respondents draw on the oppositional categories examined here in giving meaning to a bicultural identity, which is defined as being neither a "FOB" nor "whitewashed." Our data do not reveal a stable category of independent traits linked with a bicultural identity, which occupies a shifting space between the acculturative extremes where stigma is deflected and a "normal" identity is forged. The bicultural middle is a site of constant accommodation where identification with one's ethnicity or the white mainstream (or both) can be claimed as situationally required to avoid stigma. Thus biculturals can align temporarily and alternately with the assimilated and ethnic traditionals in opposing one cultural extreme or the other, depending on the context in which social interaction is occurring. Further, the biculturals can identify with whites in mainstream settings while also reaffirming presumptions of their ethnic distinctiveness. Hence the bicultural middle juggles compliance with structures of power and the resistance of racial stigma.

Dynamics of internalized oppression may not be readily apparent to outsiders. The identity codes "FOB" and "whitewashed" were engaged by our respondents on the backstage of coethnic social worlds, and not in frontstage interactions with non-Asians where such terms could be used against them. Indeed, our respondents suggest the use of these terms by non-Asian Americans would be

regarded as racist. Although respondents acknowledge the derogatory meaning of these terms, they are immensely reluctant to consider the use of these terms among coethnics as problematic. This unwillingness to see internalized racial oppression within racial/ethnic groups is widespread in our society, contributing to the reluctance of scholars to study compliance and the reproduction of inequality among racial/ethnic subordinates.

Our sample is composed of those whose parents came from largely homogenous societies in which they were members of the dominant group and became racial subordinates upon immigration. Hence our respondents might be less equipped at resisting the racial ideology and stereotypes of the new society than would members of longstanding racial groups. We cannot ascertain from our data whether later generations will use these terms. However, as long as there are racially derogatory images of Asians in the mainstream, it is likely that some form of intraethnic othering will emerge to enable the deflection of stigma. Further research is needed that examines the extent of intraethnic othering processes among other racial/ethnic groups, including those with longer histories in the U.S. Terms like "whitewashed" or "wannabe" are frequently used among Latinos and African Americans to describe those who have "sold out" to the white world (Olsen 1997), and derogatory slurs, such as "nigger" and "wetback" are used to mark negative identities. However, there has been little investigation into the basis by which these terms are applied (e.g., level of assimilation, economic or academic success, or skin color) and how these terms are used to control behavior, mark social group boundaries, and create internal hierarchies. More comparative analysis could contribute to a general theory concerning the way that internalized racial oppression organizes racial minority communities and undermines collective resistance to racial inequality. Such research would broaden our understanding of some of the forces underlying the tenacity of racism.

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