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"We're Social Justice People":

Asian American Youth Resistance and Negotiations of Race, Citizenship, Gender, and Non-Profit Contradictions

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction

of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts

in Education

by

Catherine Janeanne Chu

2016

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

"We're Social Justice People:"

Asian American Youth Resistance and Negotiation of Race,

Citizenship, Gender, and Non-Profit Contradictions

by

Catherine Janeanne Chu

Master of Arts in Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2016

Professor Robert T. Teranishi, Chair

This critical qualitative comparative case study explores narratives of resistance of Asian American youth in a social justice-oriented internship. The study draws on resistance theories and expands on the limited body of work on Asian American youth resistance. Drawing primarily on semi-structured interviews, I provide an in-depth representation of three youth's resistance and the impact that this has on their engagement with social justice. Findings indicate that youth resistance is complex and dynamic, responding to everyday contexts. As such, I focus on young people's resistance to family narratives of success and assimilation, silences on gender and sexuality, and contradictions of social justice and the limitations of non-profits. I pay particular attention to the role of social justice spaces and an internship program in fostering

youth resistance and engaging youth in social justice work – while youth simultaneously notice contradictions and attempt to hold such spaces accountable.

The thesis of Catherine Janeanne Chu is approved.

Thomas M. Phillip

Daniel G. Solórzano

Robert T. Teranishi, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2016

DEDICATION

This is dedicated to the fierce youth interns who I interviewed and worked with: Red, Thea, and Brandon! You know who you are (in more ways than one), and I am so honored that you were willing to share parts of yourself with me. In the process of writing this thesis, reading and re-reading your words, I found new and deeper meanings each time. What a learning process it has been…

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS ..... **ii**

DEDICATION ..... **v**

TABLE OF CONTENTS ..... **vi**

LIST OF FIGURES ..... **viii**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ..... **ix**

CONTEXT AND SIGNIFICANCE **1**

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW **3**

RESISTANCE THEORIES 4

ROLE OF COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS AND INTERNSHIPS 12

ASIAN AMERICAN YOUTH RESISTANCE 17

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS **20**

METHODS **21**

SITE AND PARTICIPANTS 23

DATA COLLECTION 25

DATA ANALYSIS 28

LIMITATIONS 29

RESEARCHER POSITIONALITY 30

PARTICIPANT PROFILES 32

Brandon *32*

Red *35*

Thea *37*

FINDINGS **38**

SECTION 1. MAKING IT IN AMERICA: CHALLENGING AND REDEFINING NARRATIVES OF SUCCESS AND ASSIMILATION 40

Identifying Narratives of Success and Assimilation *41*

Redefining and Resisting Success *47*

SECTION 2. SILENCES ON GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN SOCIAL JUSTICE SPACES 61

Encountering Gender Dynamics *62*

Holding a Community Accountable *70*

Organizing & Pushback *77*

Impacts of Ideology *80*

SECTION 3. ENTERING THE WORKPLACE: UNCOVERING NON-PROFIT CONTRADICTIONS 84

Professionalism and Authenticity *85*

"They're Just Interns": Limits to Opportunity *91*

Funding Limitations *94*

Danger of Burn Out *97*

Being a Leader *99*

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION **102**

1. RESISTANCE AS THEORIZING 103

2. PAIN AND LOSS OF HOPE 103

3. SPACE TO MAKE SENSE 105

Recommendations 106
Conclusion 109
APPENDICES 112
Appendix A: Development of Research Questions 112
Appendix B: Interview Protocol 114
Appendix C: Models Presented in Interview 116
Appendix D: Group interview Protocol 118
REFERENCES 120

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Transformational Resistance Typology 6

Figure 2. Brandon's Activist Map 34

Figure 3. Red's Activist Map 36

Figure 4. Thea's Activist Map 38

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CONTEXT AND SIGNIFICANCE

"Asian Americans, as a group, can really go either way politically."

–Mari Matsuda

University of California, Los Angeles 2014 Critical Race Symposium.

.

When I started conceptualizing my thesis, a number of incidents helped to set the context for my thinking on Asian American[1] resistance and Asian American youth resistance in particular. The murders of Mike Brown in August 2014 and Eric Garner in July 2014, the resulting non-indictment of the police officers who are directly responsible for their deaths, and scenes of Ferguson, Missouri turned into warzone patrolled by militarized police sparked further explosions of resistance nationwide and opened new possibilities for organizing in the ongoing fight for racial justice. In the following months, some Asian American activists and communities began mobilizing in support of Black organizing efforts, many of them coming together under

[1] I use Asian Americans here as a racial-political category "initially used to describe a politically charged group identity in the ethnic consciousness movements of the late 1960s" (J. Lee & Zhou, 2004, p. 11). However, I recognize that many Asians in the U.S. would not consider themselves "Asian American," as that is also an umbrella term that is sometimes as exclusive in practice as it in inclusive in theory. In this paper I use Asian American when referring to my research questions and topic because ways in which this racial-political category impacts my participants. However, one of my participants challenges the term "Asian American" as a term that accurately advances an agenda of racial justice or justice for people of Asian descent in the U.S. As an undocumented immigrant, she rejects the oppressive distinction of "American" and prefers to identify as Pinay. Similarly, some Asians in the U.S. may prefer to break out groups that have distinctive experiences that influence their relationship to race and the U.S., like South Asians and Filipinos. Others may prefer ethnic identities like Pakistani American or simply Pakistani, and some may not consider themselves American as a result of their immigration journey or motive for migrating, diasporic ties, citizenship status, negative experiences in the U.S., etc. This distinction is legal, social, political, and cultural, self-determined and prescribed. Nevertheless it can be argued the people with Asian heritage in the U.S. are often racialized into categories like South Asian or Asian American. The specific racialization of these categories (such as the racialization of South Asians post 9/11) though, may result in the divergence of groups within the Asian American category towards whiteness and blackness, or a tri-racial system (Bonilla-Silva, 2004).

the banners: #APIs4BlackLives and #SouthAsians4BlackPower,[2] and rallying for a Model Minority Mutiny.[3] They sought to incite Asian Pacific Islander (API) and South Asian resistance and organizing against state violence and oppression and for Black liberation.

This call to action is important for Asian American communities. It talks back to an Asian American master narrative of the model minority (S. J. Lee, 1996; National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education [CARE], 2008; Ngo & Lee, 2007; Osajima, 1988). Historically, the financial and academic success of specific Asian American ethnic groups has positioned Asian Americans more broadly as a group somewhere in between Whites on one side and Blacks, Latinos and Indigenous peoples on the other (with other racial/ethnic groups also occupying an ambiguous space). Many scholars have theorized the position(s) that Asian Americans occupy in the U.S. racial hierarchy or configuration (Kim, 1999, 2000; Bonilla-Silva, 2004). It is widely recognized that Asian Americans, as a racial-political group, often is cast or effectively acts as a "wedge group," meaning that Asian Americans destabilize the conception of a collective "people of color" by being compared to other race-based identity groups or by participating in the oppression of other groups (Kim, 1999; Matsuda, 1993; Prashad, 2000; Smith, 2006). For instance, by deploying a model minority narrative, Asian Americans are used (and sometimes use themselves) as an exemplary example of success in a post-racial society, which is often framed to invalidate the lived experiences of

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[2] Ashley Uyeda and Amanda Wake launched a Facebook page with this hashtag in December 2014 as a compilation of past solidarity efforts and to further centralize a call for API resistance. #SouthAsians4BlackPower was launched in April 2015, to amplify calls for South Asian resistance.

[3] In her blog post calling for a Model Minority Mutiny, Soya Jung (2014) ends with this call to action: "It is time for Asian Americans to unleash model minority mutiny, link arms with the struggle for black liberation, and together, finally turn the world right side up. Let's build the analysis, forge the commitments, and create the strategies we need for a united front against white supremacy."

racial injustices faced by Black communities and individuals, as well as other communities of color.

As an Asian American with class, educational, and U.S. citizenship privilege, I often find this positioning difficult to navigate while holding myself accountable to a larger goal of justice. How can I resist? What is my theory of change, and what is my part in transformation of society? Having spent most of my activist life organizing young people first as a student activist and later a youth organizer and youth worker, I remain committed to activating young people to organize on behalf of themselves, demand a say in their lives, and push back against systemic oppression. Additionally, scholars, activists, and organizations stress the need for youth leadership in social movements and visioning the future (see Ginwright, 2010; Noguera, 2014). These hopes and experiences motivate my interest Asian American youth resistance, which I hope others will find important as well. As such, this thesis explores the following research questions:

1. How do Asian American youth involved in social justice-oriented programs resist dominant ideologies and structures?
2. How have social justice-oriented programs facilitated or not facilitated their resistance?

Asian Americans are the fastest growing racial/ethnic group in the United States according to the 2010 U.S. Census, and do not show any signs of slowing down (Brown, 2014; CARE, 2011; US Census Bureau, 2012). As the population continues to grow, will Asians and Asian Americans in the U.S. lean toward the arc of justice? This social justice-oriented research project begins with the assumption that this is a crucial question for Asian Americans and for racial and social justice more broadly.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, I detail the theoretical frameworks and empirical scholarship that informs this project. I begin with an overview of resistance theories generally, and describe theoretical contributions to resistance scholarship that guide my research. Additionally, I review literature addressing the role of community organizations in fostering conscious resistance and involvement in social justice movements, as my study is based in a youth internship program at the Asian Pacific Islander Center (APIC),[4] a community-based organization in California. I then review empirical scholarship that specifically focuses on Asian American youth and resistance or activism,[5] highlighting the limited scope of studies that have addressed resistance among Asian American youth.

Resistance Theories

Why the focus on youth? Noguera and Cannella (2006) remind us that "social movements in the United States and elsewhere have relied heavily upon strategic resistance among young people" (p. 336). Youth resistance is not inherently different than adult resistance. However, as many critical pedagogues have challenged, young people tend to be regarded as empty vessels to be filled with knowledge, and even as we develop young people's leadership they are often framed as our future leaders. As Kelley (2014) points out, we cannot simply treat young people "as those will be inheriting the future," we have to treat them as "part of the active present" (p. 92; also see Wyn & White, 1997).

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[4] Pseudonym used to protect identities of research study participants.

[5] I include studies that do not use resistance theory as a main theoretical framework because of the limited number of studies that have engaged deeply with resistance and focused on Asian American youth. These additional studies detail Asian American youth engaged in resistance but may focus on a different aspect of their activism such that resistance theories may not be a fit, or were not considered.

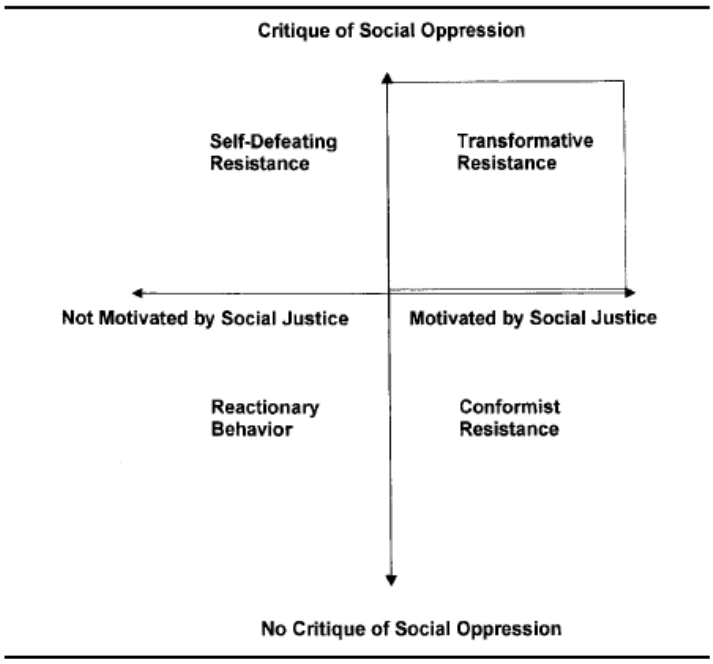
Resistance theories are useful to this project in that they represent both a micro and a macro perspective on dominant ideology and structures. They recognize human agency in navigating the dominant forces that permeate everyday life and institutions. At its most basic, Kelley (2014) writes, "resistance is simply a description … of pushing against social forces" (p. 95). As individuals push against forces and structures, they are forced to "negotiate and struggle" amongst oppressive forces, through which they "create meanings of their own from these interactions" (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 315). Examining resistance requires recognition of the complexity of resistance and accommodation in individual interactions with structures of domination (Giroux, 1983).

The emphasis on agency and complexity in the push and pull with structures is core to resistance research. Resistance theories and research emerged in response and critique of overly deterministic theories of social and cultural reproduction (Dimitriadis, 2014). Simply put, reproduction theorists (Althusser, 1971; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Bowles & Gintis, 1976) explained the reproduction of dominant society through schools and/or culture, and in particular, the reproduction of social and economic relations that maintain (and are in the interest of) the capitalist system (Giroux, 1983). Resistance theorists (Giroux, 1983; Kelley, 1994; Scott, 1990; Willis, 1977) interjected by asserting that there exists some amount of human agency in which individuals can resist dominant cultures but are also complicit in their own oppression. In doing so, resistance theories reframed oppositional behavior from a pathologizing deficit lens to one of resistance to dominant structures and cultures. Additionally, Giroux (1983) posits that resistance should necessarily have an element of consciousness (a "critique of domination"), provide opportunity for self-reflection, and be part of a larger struggle "in the interest of self-emancipation and social emancipation" (p. 109). Many scholars (Noguera, Ginwright, &

Cammarota, 2006; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001) have taken up this notion, while also recognizing that there are "different levels or gradations of resistance" (Noguera, 2014, p. 79).

Solórzano and Delgado Bernal (2001) build on Giroux's conception of resistance to theorize a matrix of resistance conscious, further specifying variations of critical and non-critical resistance as well as non-resistance. Giroux's notion of emancipatory resistance exists in the matrix as "transformational resistance."

Figure 1. Transformational Resistance Typology
(Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 318)



Because the authors take a social justice framework perspective of resistance, they propose that transformational resistance "offers the greatest possibility for social change" (2001, p. 319). Other forms of resistance include self-defeating resistance, reactionary behavior, and conformist resistance. Self-defeating resistance refers to the instances of resistance that are based in a critique of social oppression or dominant structures, but ultimately may end up to be

detrimental to the agent's struggle to rise above their[6] oppression or liberate themselves. This form of resistance refers to much of that originally studied in resistance research, such as Willis' (1977) example of working class youth who adopt a firm opposition to authority and school as an institution, founded in their experiences of school as a place to "make you 'work'" (p. 26). In doing so, however, they reproduce their class position. Reactionary behavior is considered to be non-resistance in this model, referring instead to oppositional behavior that is not based in any critique of oppression. However, I believe there still remains a need to carefully examine reactionary behavior for the possibility of emerging from and responding to oppressive conditions, regardless of whether there is an explicit critique of conditions – such that the line between self-defeating resistance and reactionary behavior might in reality be quite blurry. Conformist resistance refers to behavior that is motivated by social justice and focuses on the ability of the individuals to combat their own misfortune. Thus behaviors that fall into conformist resistance are not linked to a critique of systems of power, nor do they work to change systems of power. For instance, Solórzano and Delgado Bernal identify threads of conformist resistance in individuals or organizations that provide academic tutoring or mentoring to students who have less access to educational resources, but do not advocate for or recognize a need for transformation of the education system to address educational inequalities. Transformational resistance, on the other hand, describes behaviors that do include a critique of systems of power and oppression, and are motivated by a vision of social justice.

Solórzano and Delgado Bernal also add the caveat that the model is not fully encompassing of all forms of resistance or oppositional behavior (p. 317), though it should be

[6] In this paper I occasionally use the singular pronoun "they" as a gender neutral pronoun (McCulloch, 2015).

noted that most researchers employing the model stay within the four behaviors. Other noteworthy characteristics of resistance they underscore are the internal and external dimensions of resistance (in which more subtle forms of resistance – sometimes revealed through getting to know a students' deeper motivations and meaning making – are overlooked), the intersectional dimensions of subordination that LatCrit[7] illuminates, and the possibility that these forms of resistance may manifest differently along the lines of gender (p. 317).[8]

Responding to Giroux, Solórzano and Delgado Bernal, and Noguera, Ginwright and Cammarota's (2006) frameworks of resistance, Tuck and Yang (2011a, 2014a) caution against misinterpreting resistance as representing linear developmental stages of empowerment that discount other forms of resistance, or that imply idealized, prescriptive forms of resistance. In the case of the transformational resistance model, there is clearly one form of resistance (transformational resistance) that is praised over others. Even in my interviews, youth (who I perceived as very critical and motivated by social justice) challenged the idea that it was ideal to be the most critical and most motivated by social justice, given the ways in which that can also be defeating within a much bigger system. Additionally, they critiqued more generally the

[7] Solórzano and Delgado Bernal's (2001) use of LatCrit (short for Latina/Latino Critical Race Theory) in education stems from the critical legal framework, Critical Race Theory (CRT). Delgado Bernal (2002) writes: "LatCrit is concerned with a progressive sense of a coalitional Latina/Latino pan-ethnicity (Valdes, 1996)" and "theorize[s] issues such as language, immigration, ethnicity, culture, identity, phenotype, and sexuality" (p. 108) with an intersectional analysis. She further explains that "CRT and LatCrit in education can be defined as a framework that challenges the dominant discourse on race, gender, and class as it relates to education by examining how educational theory, policy, and practice subordinate certain racial and ethnic groups" (p. 109).

[8] I find this comment both intriguing and underexplored (as it was not the main thesis of the article). Later in this section I introduce questions about whether resistance might manifest differently along the lines of race or ethnicity as well. This is also underexplored in my thesis, in that I am comparing manifestations of resistance with those of other racial or ethnic groups, but it is a question I am interested in exploring.

assumption of a unified vision of "social justice," having seen how a "social justice space" for one group may mean an oppressive environment for another group.[9]

Indeed, the simplicity of the model lends itself to applications that may also simplify a vision of social justice or understanding of oppression and dominant structures.[10] For instance, anticolonial/decolonizing scholars Tuck and Yang (2011a) critique Giroux's notion of resistance for its alignment with Eurocentric notions of social justice and progress towards transformation of capitalism. A vision of decolonization is not necessarily included in Western conceptions of social justice, which are more often seeks equitable inclusion in society (Grande, 2004). Solórzano (with Yosso; 2005), too, has recognized a related, but different, tension in the visions of social justice and theories of change that are embedded in his and others' work towards racial justice: More often than not, scholarship with a racial justice agenda (and we can likely extend to social justice agendas) may not necessarily lead to a radical transformation of society but rather leaves structures of domination intact, despite making gains that increase their power within the system.[11]

It is with these critiques in mind that I apply resistance theories to my findings. Important questions I bear in mind are: what is the vision of social justice implied in a conscious resistance or a transformational resistance model? Who decides? How can multiple visions of social justice

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[9] I will expand on these critiques later on in this paper. However, I do not directly assess the utility of the transformational resistance model beyond this.

[10] On the other hand, though, the model is rather accessible, which allowed me to incorporate the model into my discussions with my participants. Solórzano (2013) has also written about the pedagogical applications of this model with youth – for instance, hearing from a math teacher who used the model to teach the Cartesian coordinate system from a social justice perspective.

[11] Solórzano and Yosso draw on Gorz's (1967) description of three types of social "reforms" (reformist reform, non-reformist reform, and revolutionary) to discuss their work – non-reformist reform referring to reforms which leave structures intact, while revolutionary reforms refers to those that transform society. Both of these challenge structures of domination but only revolutionary reform transforms them.

be accommodated? Though I cannot fully answer these questions with this research, a lens of resistance that is attentive to these limitations also better illuminates multiple and multi-dimensional manifestations of resistance and better attends to multi-pronged and interlocking systems of power and domination.

Another question driving my exploration of resistance is the question of "who?" Who can enact resistance? Gilmore (2014) reminds us that "resistance is everywhere," but not everything is resistance (p. 230). Traditionally, resistance is studied and theorized in those with the least structural power, with those who are in the margins. It is "part of life for people in the margins," for those who are predicted (by statistics, by those in power, by structural racism and classism) to fail (Fordham, 2014, p. 100). I believe we absolutely need to lift up resistance in the face of otherwise deterministic predictions. But for some of us (us being Asian Americans and South Asian Americans), we are not predicted to fail; we are expected to fit into the model minority narrative and succeed, in a very particular way.[12] As such, what might be different about Asian American resistance?

On this question of how to understand the resistance of those somewhere in the middle, James Scott (2014) offers an important examination of Paul Willis' *Learning to Labour*, which explored theories of resistance:

> One of Paul Willis' brilliant insights in *Learning to Labour* concerns the kids who are not resisting, the "ear'oles," who do what the teacher tells them, try to get ahead, and get good marks under the promise that they're getting to the promised

[12] My intention here is not to generalize Asian Americans and South Asian Americans as "model minorities," as there has been a lot of documented scholarship challenging a blanket generalization and aggregation of Asian American (for instance Teranishi, Lok, & Nguyen, 2013). However, all of my participants expressed feeling like they needed to fit into the model minority narrative at some point (in order to meet their families' expectations of success).

> land of a middle-class job. The openly resistant kids, the lads as he calls them, are already cynical and disillusioned; they don't expect anything from the system. They just want to get through, get to the pub, and put in a bad-faith day at the factory. It's the ear'oles who buy the hegemonic promise and who pay a price every day by not screwing around and suffering the ridicule from the lads. Of course, the system doesn't deliver. The ear'oles become the trade union militants. They become the radicals because they sacrificed for the promises and were betrayed by the system (p. 65).

In other words, Scott's re-reading of Willis' study considers the working class students (the ear'oles) who were assumed conformist, or were not exhibiting open (external) resistance, and traces their future trajectory towards radical resistance, while the lads in turn reproduced their working class position.[13] Thus what is once conformity or accommodation has the potential to become resistance, from realizing the false promise of meritocracy and upward mobility in a capitalist system. This "counter-intuitive insight" that Scott poses reveals the possibility that "the ear'oles pose a much greater threat to the social order" (Dimitriadis, 2014, p. 35).

In the context of the intersection of race and class, Asian Americans (but East Asians in particular) have been promised not just a middle-class job, but also safety and security by buying into the social order (Prashad, 2000).[14] This promise of a middle-class job was brought up by all of my participants in their conversations with me and with each other in our focus group. The assumed conformity of the ear'oles, like the Asian American master narrative of the model minority, also poses an opportunity for resistance. Scott (1990) writes, "the system may have the

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[13] Willis also remarks on this historical turn of events: "as the subsequent history of the lads and ear'oles shows, in time many of them did change places, depending on the accidents of the labour market" (Kleijer & Tillekens, 2003).

[14] I quote Vijay Prashad here, though he is writing specifically to and about South Asians and Indian Americans in particular. That said, I did not single out South Asians along with East Asians because we have seen the precariousness of that promise of safety for South Asians, Muslim Americans, and Arab Americans post-9/11.

most to fear from those subordinates among whom the institutions of hegemony have been most successful" (p. 107). I am of course not suggesting that Asian Americans and South Asians have activated all of this "potential" for resistance, nor that Black and brown communities or other marginalized groups should not be a focus of resistance research. However, I do believe Asian Americans pose an intriguing case for resistance research.

Resistance theories provide a useful backdrop to help me examine Asian American youth resistance and its complexities. However, it is also important to recognize what youth resistance is not: youth resistance is not a transformation of society. As Signithia Fordham (2014, p. 102) asks, "what does an umbrella do for the rain?" An umbrella does nothing to change the rain. Likewise, resistance is limited to a certain degree.[15] By recognizing its limits in this study, I hope to honor, but not romanticize resistance. I aim channel Michelle Fine's (2014) poignant description of resistance: "Resistance is an epistemological stance by researchers, activists, practitioners and educators [that] recognizes the individual and collective, embodied and spoken desire, pain, inquiry and lust for justice in the lives of youth" (p. 54).

Role of Community Organizations and Internships

This study focuses on a community-based organization with a youth program. As such, I have also found it instructive to examine a few relevant theoretical and practical discussions on the role of youth programs, which help to frame my study. Scholars have highlighted the key roles that community-based youth programs and organizations are playing in activating and

[15] Pedro Noguera (2014) encourages resistance scholars pay close attention to spaces for organizing (as) resistance, asserting his belief that "organizing is the highest form of resistance" and has the possibility of moving movements and engaging in the transformation of society (p. 75).

organizing young people (Noguera et al., 2006), reflecting a belief that "CYBOs may represent contexts within which urban youth can transform themselves into powerful public actors and effect change on the very social, political, and economic contexts that contribute to their marginalization" (O'Donoghue, 2006, p. 230). Thus CYBOs can become spaces to help organize resistance and facilitate conscious youth resistance.

In a review of organizations doing youth organizing, the Funders' Collaborate on Youth Organizing (FCYO; Ginwright, 2010) details the need for a leadership pipeline into progressive social justice movements. Youth organizing groups often engage young people in social justice issues when they are in high school and foster an interest in political issues. In a survey of 124 youth members of youth organizing groups, "50% of youth reported that they planned to stay involved with activism in the future and nearly 40% reported that they wanted to find a job in organizing in the future" (Mediratta, Shah, & McAlister, 2009 as cited in Ginwright, 2010, p. 10). However youth organizations find students are lacking the experience and skills needed to enter directly into their organizations, creating a "leadership crisis within the social justice movement" (Ginwright, 2010, p. 2). Implied in this is a strong desire to ensure that leadership comes out of these organizations' working class / low-income youth of color populations.

Though the organization (APIC) I base my research at does not explicitly do youth organizing, the high school programs and the internship program my participants have been engaged in fit the description of a leadership pipeline. As Ginwright writes, these leadership pipelines might involve college preparation, employment in the organization or a partner organization, and training. Ginwright describes three phases of the pipeline: 1) the Entry Phase, in which young students are recruited into an organization, 2) the Development Phase, which engages high school students in political consciousness raising and builds their skills in

recognizing issues and affecting change, and 3) the Transition Phase, during which post-secondary students build on their skills within a environment that matches their commitment to social justice.[16] It is rare that an organization has enough paid internship opportunities to create a leadership pipeline and cadre of interns within their organization, but APIC has been able to do so. Ideally, interns find opportunities that allow them to hone in on their particular interests. "During the transition phase, young people are guided by a 'moral compass,' where social justice values permeate every aspect of their lives." (2010, p. 19). This description, in particular, gives context to the internship space that I conducted my research in.

Recognizing a gap in attention to community organizations in nurturing resistance, Covarrubias and Tijerina Revilla (2003) theorize a model for Agencies of Transformational Resistance, or ATRs, based on their research in Chicanx[17] communities. They identify six roles or characteristics of ATRs:

1. They create a community of inclusiveness
2. They provide valuable resources for community members
3. They provide a critical voice for the community regarding community issues
4. They empower the community through the expansion of resources and development of skills
5. They help members of the community develop a raised level of consciousness and commitment to social justice, and

[16] These stages were also discussed in FCYO's 2010 Youth Organizing Field Scan (Torres-Fleming, Valdes, & Pillai, 2010).

[17] Chicanx is a gender inclusive/neutral term that originates from the terms Chicana and Chicano and as an alternative to Chican@ or Chicana/o, which represents Chicana and Chicano. Proponents and adopters of Chicanx consider it to be more inclusive of multiple genders, in that Chicana and Chicano still represents a gender binary of female and male. Similarly, Latinx is a gender inclusive term that originates from Latina and Latino (Armus, 2015; "FAQ: Why is there an 'x' at the end of Latinx, instead of Latin@?," n.d.). Others use Xicanx (See Becerril, 2015), but Covarrubias and Revilla do not use Xicana in their essay (though the term may not have come into usage yet).

6. They provide hope for educational advancement of many community members

(2003, pp. 467–468)

Additionally, Covarrubias and Revilla (2003) extend and clarify the concept of "awareness of structures of domination" (y-axis) used in Delgado Bernal's (1997) original theorization of transformational resistance.[18] They re-conceptualize this awareness to be a "multidimensional consciousness that consists of a sophisticated critique of how multiple, intersecting structures of domination interact with each other and impact one's social and political situation as part of an historical situation" (2003, p. 486). This focus on understanding the intersections of oppression and identity (Collins, 2000a, 2000b; Crenshaw, 1991) also helps to explain how in their conception, an agency might be critical of structures of domination or oppression but may not be proactive in cultivating a multidimensional or intersectional consciousness that incorporates a critique of and understanding of imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy (as bell hooks, 2004, 2012; ChallengingMedia, 2006, has named and described these structures throughout her work). For instance, Covarrubias and Revilla describe the formation of a university-based ATR named Raza Womyn, in response to micro manifestations of patriarchy within a Chican@ community space. Within a discussion of resistance to dominant structures, Covarrubias and Revilla's more explicit discussion of intersecting systems of oppressions as a contribution to the transformational resistance matrix is useful.[19]

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[18] Both of these axes were modified in Solórzano and Delgado Bernal's (2001) article introducing transformational resistance. In this publication, the y-axis was "critique of social oppression" and the x-axis was "motivated by social justice." However, Covarrubias and Revilla's contribution is still useful in that it is very specific in its emphasis on the intersections of oppression.

[19] This may, however, be more ambiguous in practice. Covarrubias and Revilla describe this characteristic of ATRs as simply raising a level of consciousness, but at other parts in the manuscript discuss the need for a multidimensional consciousness. Practically, I wonder how to evaluate the multidimensional consciousness

However, these understandings of the role of youth and community programs in youth activism and youth resistance fail to acknowledge contexts and structures affecting these programs that are often problematic and may ultimately be counter-productive. Kwon (2013) traces the mechanisms through which non-profit organizations become linked to the modern state and serve as regulatory structures that empower youth to become self-governing subjects of the state. Drawing on Foucault's governmentality, she calls this "affirmative governmentality." Kwon recognizes the activist potential of youth organizing while also examining relations of power that largely go unquestioned.

Additionally, Kwon links her critique of non-profit youth organizations to a longer trend of nonprofitization of social movements and activism following the 1960's and early 70's mass movements. Drawing on analyses from Rodriguez (2007) and a well-known anthology by Incite! Women of Color Against Violence (2007) interrogating the Non-Profit Industrial Complex (NPIC), she questions the revolutionary potential of a non-profit system that is "nevertheless subject to capitalism's logics and the neoliberal state's art of government, just as they may be engaged in practices of opposition" (2013, p. 5). Rodriguez, similarly, is concerned with the ways in which this nonprofitization regulates social movements towards social service organizations and reformist agendas that build consent for state repression (2007). Though my study does not exhaustively interrogate an organization's limitations through this nonprofitization, the critique advanced by an analysis of the NPIC is important because it also affects young people's experiences within a non-profit organization. Through this

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advanced by an ATR, given that there will always be elements of power and oppression within an organization. To use their example, Raza Womyn definitely addresses race and gender and sexuality; what if members in the organization felt it was an oppressive environment for lower-income women?

"bureaucratization of social change and dissent," Rodriguez (2007) writes, we end up "funneling activists into the hierarchal rituals and restrictive professionalism of discrete campaigns, think tanks, and organizations" (p. 26). Particularly noteworthy is the interplay between the development of non-profit careers, the restrictive professionalism and specific issue focus areas that guide non-profits, and the social justice leadership pipeline discussed by Ginwright (2010).

The operations of power illuminated by a NPIC critique are instructive in understanding youth resistance and organizations that seek to foster and facilitate youth resistance or consciousness. Youth resistance occurs not just in response to larger state structures or educational institutions but also within non-profit organizations and social justice-oriented spaces. These spaces may in fact accommodate and reinforce a neoliberal state agenda and/or dominant structures and logics. Thus I have selected these concepts that help to frame a complex understanding of youth resistance within a social justice-oriented internship program.

Asian American Youth Resistance

Studies about youth resistance (Covarrubias & Revilla, 2003; Fine, 1991; Noguera et al., 2006; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Tuck & Yang, 2011b, 2014b) rarely engage the specific stories of Asian American youth, who, because of the racial positioning of Asian Americans, have diverse and unique experiences in navigating dominant ideologies that sometimes privilege us in relation to others and sometimes criminalize us. Studies that explicitly discuss resistance theory and Asian American youth are often based in colleges and universities (Poon, 2013; Ryoo & Ho, 2013), but are less likely to feature K-12 schooling and community-based youth organizations. This research seeks to address a gap in the literature on the role of youth organizations and programs.

Soo Ah Kwon (2013, 2008, 2006) conducted extensive ethnographic research on AYPAL (Asian/Pacific Islander Youth Promoting Advocacy and Leadership), an Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) youth organizing group based in Oakland. AYPAL was engaged in youth of color organizing against a Super Jail proposed in Alameda County – as Kwon notes, their presence and advocacy within and through the youth of color organizing coalition "challenged state-produced ideological representations of Asian Americans as the model minority, as well as highlighting the extent of the consequences of a depoliticized Asian American identity" (2013, p. 87). Kwon's book, Uncivil Youth: Race, Activism, and Affirmative Governmentality, is a fascinating and balanced critique of youth organizing, what she calls the "nonprofitization of activism," and state governance of those who are labeled "at-risk" youth (as I discussed earlier in this section). However, she does not devote much of her analysis to youth resistance from the perspective of the young people she worked with. In other articles based on the same ethnographic study, she describes how organizing against youth criminalization and incarceration, as praxis, facilitated AYPAL members' oppositional consciousness (2006, p. 222, 2008). Additionally, she discusses the challenge that AYPAL youth and staff posed to model minority myth-driven notions that Asian Americans were not really "people of color," and the erasure of AYPAL as a key player in the anti-Super Jail campaign. In this sense, Kwon highlights some key points of youth resistance, but does not necessarily elaborate on the intricacies of their resistance, nor does she draw heavily on youth resistance theories because of her macro focus. Regardless, her work to uncover the threads of state power woven deeply into the largely unquestioned non-profit arena of "youth empowerment" is immensely important.

Other studies by Ryoo and Ho (2013) and Poon (2013) focus on Asian American college students from a transformational resistance framework. Their research reveals interesting

findings about factors that contributed to their participants' consciousness development and orientation to social justice, but seem constrained by the need to categorize students within the typology. Ryoo and Ho (2013) apply the concept of transformational resistance to Asian American student activists at UCLA, but make a singular mention of the analysis of structural oppression and orientation towards social justice that make up transformational resistance. This seems like a missed opportunity for deeper analysis, as the quotes presented could arguably be considered conformist resistance (or some other form not well represented in the matrix). However, they do uncover unexpected themes of educational privilege paired with feeling like an outsider because of lower socio-economic status as motivation for activism. Poon (2013) also applies transformational resistance to Asian American college students, analyzing students in all quadrants by asking about their understanding of and responses to microaggressions. She suggests students who exhibited characteristics of transformative resistance seem to have access to critical race pedagogy – pedagogies that are informed by critical race theory in education – whereas others did not.

Studies on Asian American youth resistance make up a limited body of work. They have provided examples of actions or views that could be included in a transformational resistance for Asian American students, as well as factors that influence a turn towards conscious resistance (ethnic studies being a recurring theme) and organizing strategies for resistance. However, there are few Asian American youth focused studies that engage deeply with individual resistance and young people's contestation and navigation of complex structures, power relations, and narratives. Resistance, after all, is subjective and contextual – it requires us to spend time with young people to understand their decisions, meaning making, and personal motivations as actors (Kelley, 2014; Noguera, 2014).

I have also alluded to a strong theoretical body of work that suggests Asians and Asian Americans play an important role in accommodating dominant structures, particularly when the model minority narrative goes unquestioned (Kim, 1999, 2000; Matsuda, 1993; Palumbo-Liu, 1999; Prashad, 2000). Many of these activist-scholars recognize a need for a progressive Asian American resistance to actively and intentionally push against dominant structures both in society broadly and within our own racial and ethnic communities. This research seeks to fill a gap in the literature that explores the ways in which Asian American youth do resist, what they resist, and how a social justice youth internship could help facilitate resistance.

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study investigates the ways in which Asian American youth (within a social justice-oriented youth program) engage in resistance, with all its complexities. Though there is literature on Asian American youth activism, there are few that provide an in-depth look at the forms and motivations in young people's resistance, what characterizes their resistance, the impact of their resistance, and the role of a community-based youth program in fostering (or not fostering) youth resistance. Thus, my research design was guided by the following questions:

1. How do Asian American youth involved in social justice-oriented programs resist dominant ideologies and structures?
2. How have social justice-oriented programs facilitated or not facilitated their resistance?

These questions have gone through many drafts as I honed in on the core of my interest and purpose in this study. (See Appendix A.) The goal remains the same: to gain a deeper

understanding of the layers of experience, context, identity development, critique, and strategy that go into shaping youths' resistance. This is represented in Question 1. It relies on a theoretical understanding of youth resistance as potentially conscious, always engaged with dominant structures, and complex. It is also based in a call to action that advances a vision of social justice in which Asian Americans challenge complicity in the reproduction of our own oppression as well as the oppression of other marginalized groups. Question 2 provides an opportunity to explore the current context that I encounter my participants in and how it shapes their understanding and observation of their resistance. Ultimately, I realized I did not know exactly what I would find, and could not have expected what emerged and resonated with my participants.

METHODS

This study draws on critical qualitative research and comparative case study methods and analysis. Critical inquiry "...seeks not just to study and understand society but rather to critique and change society" (Patton, 2002 as quoted in Merriam, 2009). In the context of my research, critical inquiry means that I connect individual experiences to larger hegemonic ideologies and structures, while attempting to allow for the individual agency of each young person in my study. I make the assumption that these ideologies are contested and contestable. Through this research, I seek both to understand practices and meaning making as well as challenge or complicate practices and meaning making that draw on dominant ideologies, towards a larger activist goal of social and racial justice. This research project aims to better understand the complexities and the contradictions in resistance as well as the contradictions that individuals challenge. However, I also conceptualize this research with a clear agenda, in that I also seek to

better understand how to support Asian American youth in resistance that is conscious, strategic, and moves us towards a vision of justice and transformation of society.

A qualitative case study refers to an "in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system" (Merriam, 2009, p. 40). I did not start out my research project looking to conduct a case study or studies, but as I conducted my data collection and analysis it became clear that my findings would provide the in-depth descriptive accounts and bounded systems that make up case studies. Specifically, my project is a comparative case study, which focuses on youth interns in a particular youth programs department and program site that I volunteered with. The findings only describe these three individual cases, but also provide opportunities for what Stake (2007) calls "naturalistic generalization," in which a case study presents "vicarious instances and episodes that merge with existing icons of experience."

Researching resistance presents some challenges that I feel are best met with in-depth engagement with participants. As I stated before, resistance is rather subjective. Noguera poses a crucial question for resistance researchers: "How do we know if an action we observe is coming from a conscious, deliberate critique on the part of youth actors?" He observes, "resistance only seems to count if we like it, if it fits our ideological framework" (2014, p. 79). These are important methodological and theoretical challenges. In this study, I use my primary method of interviewing to understand as much of my participants' meaning making and motivations as possible. This approach affords me the opportunity to explore the intentionality of my participants' interactions, woven with their own analysis of their experiences. However, this my time spent observing was merely supplemental and I had limited opportunities to truly observe actions or interactions over an extended period of time. Interviews were completed over the span of four to five months and reflect a particular moment in my participants' lives and their thought

process. I am mindful that qualitative research inevitably runs the risk of "flatten[ing] out" research participants (Dimitriadis, 2014; Fine, 1994). Additionally, a rich context matters. As Kelley writes, "We cannot decide what resistance is, based on perceived effectiveness. We have to understand where people are coming from – the limits, the cultures, the experiences, the histories, the memories – and see self-activity as self-active, self-generated modes of struggle" (2014, p. 91). These are understandings I endeavored to cultivate and weave throughout, adding back layers in this process of flattening out and adding dimension.

Site and Participants

My research takes place at a non-profit organization in California within their youth and parent division. I call this organization the Asian Pacific Islander Center (APIC, or sometimes referred to as the Center by my participants) and I call the division Youth and Parent Empowerment (YPE). I volunteered with APIC from November 2014 to March 2015, after I moved to California for graduate school and sought out an organization where I could put my youth worker skills to good use.

Along with many other non-profit organizations founded in the eighties, APIC emerged in the aftermath of the civil rights movements of the late sixties and in the wave of non-profitization of movements that aimed to serve the community through direct service and legal advocacy. Since then, the organization has expanded and grown to offer a wide range of services, including citizenship assistance and legal aid, and pursues advocacy and social justice in multiple forms, including voter engagement, impact litigation, research, trainings and capacity building, and leadership development through school-based social justice curriculum. It is this final approach of leadership development in and through schools that is basis of the YPE division.

Through their social justice curriculum and high school programs, they are able to support the development of young people in their own identities and their community and civic engagement across the lines of ethnicity and race.

The YPE division has eight staff members and over ten interns, hosting in-school and after-school programs in several high schools in localities with high AAPI populations.[20] I started volunteering with YPE as it was starting up a leadership series based in another area with a high AAPI population, which I will call the California Valley, allowing me to meet some of the students and parents involved in their high school youth programs and in their parent networks. Almost all of the parents who participate in the programs are monolingual, speaking Cantonese, Mandarin, Vietnamese, or Spanish. Though I volunteered with APIC for five months and showed up regularly to meet up with my participants, there is much I do not know about APIC's operations and divisions aside from YPE. The YPE interns seem to make up the majority of the youth intern presence at APIC, and together, the YPE interns seem to carry out a great amount of work for the division.

Over five months, I connected with three youth interns at APIC, who make up my bounded sample. They are three interns out of a mixed Asian and Latinx intern cohort of seven who support the programs in the California Valley. The three participants I interviewed are the Asian American interns whom I volunteered with and are age 18 and up (partially for convenience with the consent process). The four others are either Latinx or in high school. All of the participants I interviewed help the YPE division facilitate programs and presentations for

[20] I do not know exactly how many interns there are currently, nor do I know exactly how many schools YPE is in at the moment. It seems that one to two interns are usually assigned to a school to facilitate the high school programs with the support of adult staff members.

high school youth, as well as plan and coordinate events. Two of them also help facilitate and plan curriculum for a monthly youth and parent leadership development workshop. The division also provides them with monthly professional development, focusing on relevant skills in social justice-oriented facilitation. They have all also been involved in APIC prior to their internship, one as a client of the organization and the other two as high school program participants. I provide profiles of my participants, Brandon, Thea, and Red, at the end of this section.

Data Collection

I conducted two 90 to 120 minute semi-structured interviews with each participant, for a total of six interviews. My interview protocol was loosely inspired by the progression of Seidman's (2013) three-part phenomenological interviews which cover: focused life history, details of experience, and reflection on the participant's meaning making of the subject.

In the first interview I conducted with participants, I started the interview with an activity I used to do as a youth worker. The activity requires both me and the participant to take 5-15 minutes to create an "activist map" of our pathway to social justice and politicization. This was similar to the way an unstructured interview might start, in that it allows me to get an overview of important events and experiences in their lives and to note the language they use. This worked very well for Red and Brandon in generating discussion and helping them to guide the conversation; for Thea I had a completely different experience, though still quite impactful and informative, based on her interpretation of the exercise. I suspect this reflected both the differences in her life story as well as personality. Red found the activist map to be a positive experience, which she shared with me at the beginning of the second interview:

> Over the years people always ask me what's my story, and it's always strange to tell them and like uh - and I feel like it wasn't a complete story. But that whole

> activity with the drawing thing I'm like whoa, yeah, that is my story. It's not like 100% my story, but it covers most of who I am, and my identity, and um, yeah, I just realize a lot of my identity comes from the people around me.

Activist maps with brief analysis are presented with the participant profiles. The rest of the first interview built on the activist map to explore themes of life and family history, personal identity, experience at APIC as an intern and in programs, and challenges they perceive in pursuing social justice activities.

The second interview dealt with themes and questions I wanted to follow up with from the first interview. In comparison to the first interview, I focused more overall on social and societal pressures, assimilation, familial expectations, race and stereotypes, and participation in social justice spaces. To close out the interview, I introduced two models[21] to participants: the transformational resistance model (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001), and a three-step critical consciousness model (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002)[22] for participants to review and reflect on. I asked them to relate their own experiences to the models, if possible. This was an experimental activity that surprised me and challenged my understanding of these concepts and models. For instance, both Brandon and Thea proposed modifications to the models, which I had posed as a possibility if they felt it did not fit quite right. Generally, the exercise seemed to prompt more critique of social justice spaces and APIC high school and intern programs than some of the other parts of the interview. For instance, the models prompted Red to share a few meaningful stories that really informed the second section of my findings on gender. The exercise also gave

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[21] The handouts I used can be found in Appendix C.

[22] While this model originally featured in my research proposal, I realized my findings, themes, and curiosity gravitated more towards resistance theories and the resistance literature. However, I have included the materials that I used in my interviews in Appendix C for interested readers.

us a concrete way to discuss how they perceive their own relationship to social justice and what they would like that relationship to be, and prompted insightful reflection from my participants about where they would situate themselves. This was particularly true for Thea. Brandon reinterpreted the diagram and together we explored how his "social justice hero" concept would fit into the model, providing an intriguing demonstration of his own meaning making with regards to social justice concepts.

In addition to my interviews, I completed two supplemental participant observations at APIC. The first was an informal intern hangout during their intern hours, and another was a facilitation workshop with the whole intern cohort, facilitated by one of their staff coordinators. I collected relevant documents like curriculum guides, meeting notes, and workshop handout, though these did not play prominently in my analysis.

Finally, near the end of the Spring 2015 quarter I conducted a one and a half hour audio-recorded group interview, which functioned as a member check and an opportunity to discuss emerging themes.[23] For this session I coordinated a date and time for my three participants and I to meet at the APIC office. In the first half of the group interview, I led them through a set of questions designed to generate reflection on the interview process for each of them, and also asked them if they thought I had a particular bias, and if so, what it was. In the second half of the group interview, I shared with them pre-selected excerpts from their interviews that stood out to me from my first and second rounds of coding. They read these excerpts and wrote down themes that they saw in their excerpts, and we followed up with a discussion about the emerging themes.

[23] For other similar approaches to member checks and data analysis, see Pérez Huber's (2012) description of a collaborative data analysis process with *testimonios* and Corina Benavides Lopez's (2010) description of a focus group member check process in her dissertation research.

Participants were welcome to share excerpts or themes if they felt comfortable, though they kept most of the excerpts to themselves, preferring to share a summary of the excerpts. This group interview was instrumental to my analysis, further demonstrating their own understandings of their perspectives about the model minority myth and definitions of success they navigate in their families, as well as a more nuanced critique and appreciation of their internship program. At the end of the group interview I presented each of a copy of their two interview transcripts. I also gave them each a $50 gift card of their choice in appreciation of their time and openness, and brought in lunch for us to eat before the interview. Group interview protocol is found in Appendix D.

Data Analysis

Data Analysis occurred in multiple cycles, using the interviews and participant observations (the activist map and introduction of models were captured in the interview audio). I eventually transcribed in full every interview, but started with indexing some of the interviews and selectively transcribing to get a sense of the data. I conducted a preliminary analysis on one participant, Thea, for a class in Winter 2015 quarter. The first round of coding started before my final interview took place with Brandon, but I coded a partial transcription of the interview at the end of the first round. From first round codes, done with pencil and paper, I generated code categories by adapting Bazeley's (2013) tip for creating Word documents in outline format and rearranging codes to form code categories. From this set of codes I conducted a second round of coding using the Word comment function, and I typed all codes into an Excel spreadsheet. I added some additional codes while coding, but kept my additions to a minimum in the second round. The spreadsheet allowed me to count codes and generate a list of total occurrences of

more frequent codes and the number of times each participant's interview was coded with that code. This process helped me to see common themes across all participants.

In the summer of 2015 I revisited my data and conducted a third round of coding using the Dedoose software. This allowed me to refocus my code categories to better reflect the data. I found myself noticing areas of pain, frustration, confusion, hope, and loss of hope, which I later connected to Robin Kelley's explanation of resistance as diagnostic: "Everyday acts of resistance are telling you what people desire. They are telling you what causes pain. They are telling you where there are trouble spots. They are telling you where people are confused. Everyday acts of resistance are revelatory, revealing things about social relationships and power" (2014, p. 87). I also noticed the ways in which participants redefined narratives, which I had faintly noticed in my first two rounds, but did not code in the same way. This became a subtheme in my first section of findings. Altogether, these processes resulted in the three significant themes: 1) Making it in America: Challenging and redefining narratives of success and assimilation, 2) Silences on gender and sexuality in social justice spaces, and 3) Entering the workplace: Uncovering non-profit contradictions.

Limitations

I acknowledge some significant limitations to this study: my research is exploratory and would definitely benefit from additional participants and more time for observation and immersion. In particular, I would be interested to rework the study to use youth participatory action research methods, since, according to Guishard and Tuck, "youth resistance research may be most compelling when it is designed to think *with* youth about injustice and resistance" (2014, p. 185). Michelle Fine also cautions against conducting research that is confined to a particular

moment in time, as resistance shifts over time and may involve a "moment of eruption," engagement and organizing over time, shifts in consciousness and perspective, as well as the "mo(u)rning after" in which youth resistance and movements may ebb and morph (2014, pp. 50–51).

Additionally, I was learning to conduct qualitative research while conceptualizing my study, collecting data, and analyzing data, resulting in many course changes. I was also not able to spend much time with staff or conduct any staff interviews, resulting in a limited picture of staff pedagogies and perspective on the internship and high school program structures and design. Further research could investigate a youth program or leadership pipeline as the primary focus, interviewing past and present staff, and spending more time with the program and organization, to complement the research on youth leaders. This study also utilized some experimental methods of data collection, namely, the Activist Map and resistance and consciousness model activities, which I was unable to fully evaluate in terms of effectiveness.

Researcher Positionality

My own positionality as an ethnically Cantonese Asian American involved in local social justice-oriented campaigns and organizations invariably inform my research. I approach research with Asian American youth resistance drawing on my own personal experience growing up second-generation in an upper-middle class immigrant Cantonese household, my experience as a youth worker/organizer and social justice educator, and as a researcher with an academic background in gender and sexuality studies. In conducting interviews and participant observation, I was cognizant that the information I shared could potentially influence the responses I got. At the same time, I draw inspiration from critical scholars (such as Chicana

feminist scholars Flores Carmona, 2014; Téllez, 2005; Villenas, 1996) who have challenged strict researched / researcher boundaries that reify power dynamics; for instance, such scholars challenge empirical interviewing methods in which the researcher is expected to be able to maintain an objective, neutral presence. Such a presence would seem to be impossible. Even so, I took great care to not introduce concepts or ideological labels such as the "model minority," the "American dream", and "capitalism" in my interviews, in order to honor the narratives and framing that the participants themselves presented. Though I never found an easy balance, I pushed myself to both share of myself and also hold back on certain topics until it felt appropriate.

My participants also challenged me with scenarios I did not expect. One turned a question back on me, genuinely asking how I dealt with a tension that I was inquiring about. Another asked me how their interview compared to other people's interviews and comments. Yet another participant shared a story layered with pain and frustration near the end of our second interview. I decided that in order to honor the story they shared with me and validate their own experience, I would discuss some resources and concepts that seemed relevant. I revisited the story after I finished asking my prescribed interview questions, and let her know about literature, interventions, and groups I knew of that were addressing the issue in activist spaces. I hoped to convey there were others also concerned about this issue. In the first interview for each of my participants, I also shared parts of my own story in our introductory Activist Map activity, which I will discuss later. These exercises and surprises caused me to interrogate my own positionality and what I was willing to share with my participants in the interest of being a resource and an ethical, trustworthy researcher. How natural that my participants would want to engage with me on the same topics that I was asking personal questions about! How strange that in an intimate

sharing of their lives, we would engage as researcher and research subject. That said, I also believe in the validation and warmth in active listening, to hear another's thoughts and story without the interruptions of my own story.

A final challenge is in the writing of this thesis – my uncertainty about how my participants will read their own words intermingled with my own. Many times they shared frustrations with me about their lives and their internship experience, but some expressed nervousness about critiquing their workplace. I understand this hesitancy; I feel it too. At the same time I found their stories and analyses very insightful and saw how these critiques represented some of their core values. I navigated tension between deciding how to uplift their experiences, while also recognizing the complexity in simultaneously holding both critique of and gratitude for an organization, and the power dynamics of being an intern at a large non-profit. As such, I attempted to make the sites more anonymous and to share the multiple truths my participants recognized at once.

Participant Profiles

Brandon

Brandon is a second generation, Cambodian American film major at California State University East Hills, who grew up in a lower-middle income household in the California Valley.[24] He is the youngest of six, born in the U.S. after his family fled Cambodia when Vietnam took control of the government and ousted the Khmer Rouge. Brandon's father was in the Cambodian military and had helped train US soldiers. His father did what he could to make

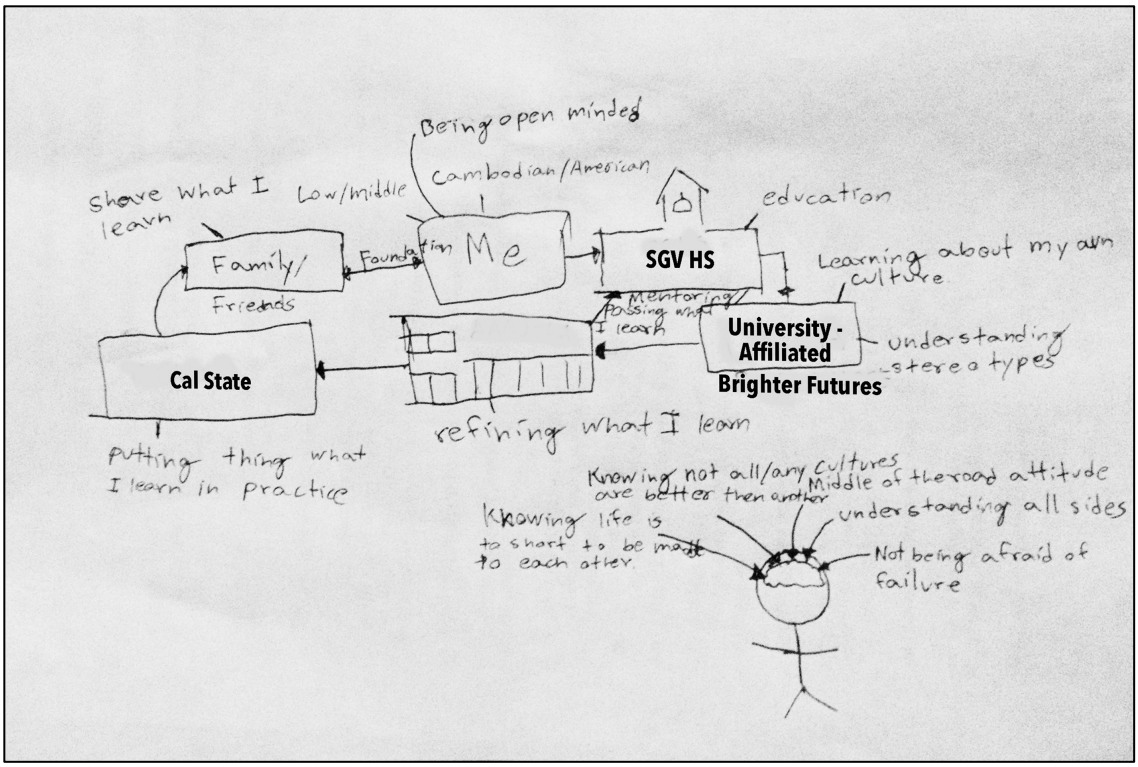
[24] University names and names of regions in California used in this paper are all pseudonyms to protect the identities of the participants.

sure his family was resettled in the U.S., so his children could live prosperous lives. Growing up in the Valley, Brandon did not have much access to Cambodian culture or community beyond his family. It wasn't until he participated in Brighter Futures, a sponsored after school tutoring program for Southeast Asians, that he met and connected with other Cambodians and started to learn about racial stereotypes. Now an intern with the same program (which has since formed a partnership with APIC), he helps the students at his former high school to produce films that explore race, identity, and issues at their school – he describes this as his ideal film project. He has developed a passion for producing video and films and plans to prove his family (who thinks film is not a worthy career) wrong by getting great grades and pursuing his passion at the same time.

Brandon prides himself on keeping an open mind to different perspectives and a commitment to looking at the facts to be as objective as possible. He cites his experiences being bullied from third grade till ninth grade for being placed in special education as part of his openness and "do no harm" approach. Consequently, he also critiques the school system for requiring students to behave and act in a particular way, i.e. sitting still for eight hours. Brandon cares about social justice but he also enjoys being "in the middle" (more politically moderate) and making up his own mind on different issues. He is able to speak to people on multiple sides of an issue and also recognizes he can relate to conservatives in some ways, citing a love for firearms. More than the other participants, Brandon was eager to connect his personal philosophy to different political opinions he held, frequently using examples of his opinions on religion, gun control, abortion, and LGBTQ rights. For instance, in speaking about being open minded as a core value of his, Brandon declares, "That's just kind of basis for what I think, what I feel. While

being open minded and telling people like just, go out, learn something, don't be prejudiced, don't hate Islam because of the World Trade Center. Islam didn't do that, people did that."

Figure 2. Brandon's Activist Map[25]



Brandon's Activist Map emphasizes his connection to the Valley and institutions that shaped his philosophy on life. Unique to his map is a diagram of core values that make up his viewpoint. He is highly curious of the ways in which his perspectives may differ from others. From the start, Brandon was willing to share how his family history greatly influenced his upbringing and he stressed the impact of growing up knowing few other Cambodian families and peers.

[25] Activist Maps have been edited to protect the identities of participants.

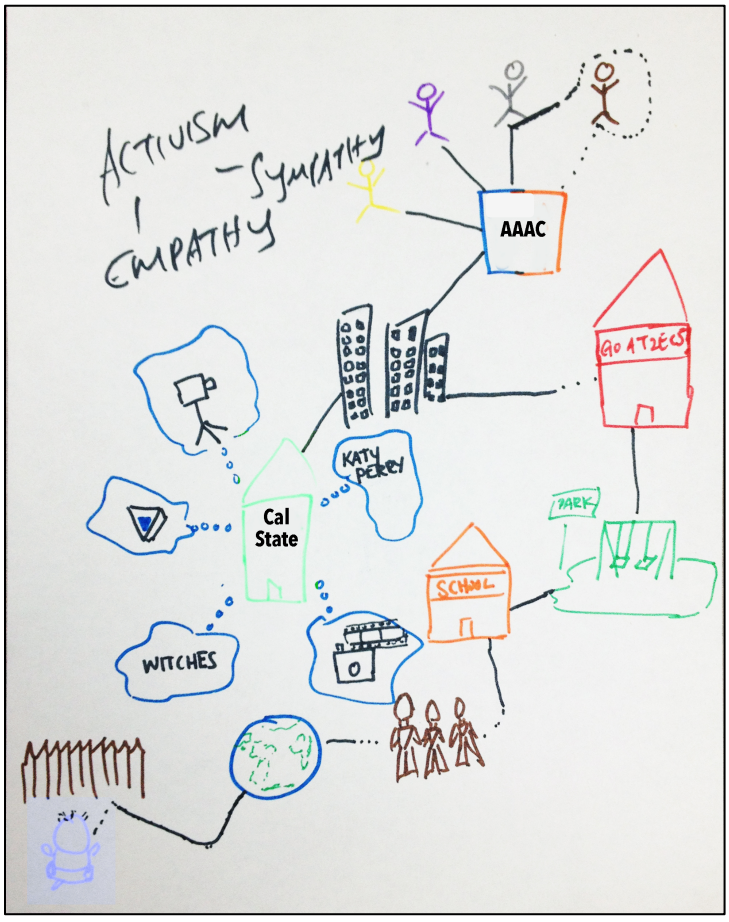
Red

Red is a 1.5-generation film major at California State University South Beach who grew up in a lower income household in the California Valley. She is ethnically Hakka and Cantonese and her parents and grandparents were from Vietnam and Cambodia, so she also identifies as Southeast Asian. She has been involved in APIC for five to six years, starting when she joined Starfruit, an APIC-sponsored after-school club at her high school, as a sophomore. She traces her interest in social justice and making a difference back to her childhood and wanting to get out into the world. She grew up feeling confined by her mother, who was very protective and didn't allow Red to go out or spend time with friends and family without her when she was younger. She also referenced experiences being bullied as a child as part of her motivation for challenging injustice. In middle and high school, Red started to become aware of ethnic and class divisions and gender and sexuality issues. In college she has been drawn to feminism and representation of women in art and media. Since starting college she has been an intern with APIC's YPE department, first helping out with Starfruit and now facilitating other youth leadership programs through APIC.

Red is very empathetic to others, has a strong sense of justice and injustice, and has been building up the confidence to stand up for herself, especially to her family and colleagues at work. She balances speaking up and learning about social justice, power, and oppression, while also wanting to see where people are coming from and not being quick to judge. She has been organizing meetings with other female interns at APIC to address problematic behavior or comments from some male interns and gendered dynamics and favoritism among the intern cohort.

In describing her Activist Map, Red emphasized the influence of people on her development – friends, relatives, her mother, and colleagues at APIC. She paid particular attention to who supported her and who held her back. She was also able to identify discussions and learning moments that really helped to open her mind, including conversations with friends and a particular class in college where she learned to critically analyze representations of gender and sexuality in a popular Katy Perry music video. Red also highlighted challenges and barriers to her activism, representing them as a fence and individuals whose perspectives she did not agree with. At the same time, she identified how these experiences helped her grow. She made use of colors and symbolism to demonstrate her supportive and challenging relationships to people.

Figure 3. Red's Activist Map



Thea

Thea is an undocumented Pinay who is an Urban Planning major and Women's and Gender and Sexuality minor at California State University Coast Side. She first got introduced to APIC as a client, and the organization then connected her to the local immigrant justice movement. However, her politicization came from the arrest of her parents by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in 2013, leading to the "hardest ten months" of her life. Her parents were detained and she had to work to support both herself and her younger brother. She stayed in contact with APIC staff during this time, and she later quit her exploitative job and joined the YPE department as an intern to help with their work on immigration. She currently conducts presentations on immigration for the different youth and parent programs in the California Valley.

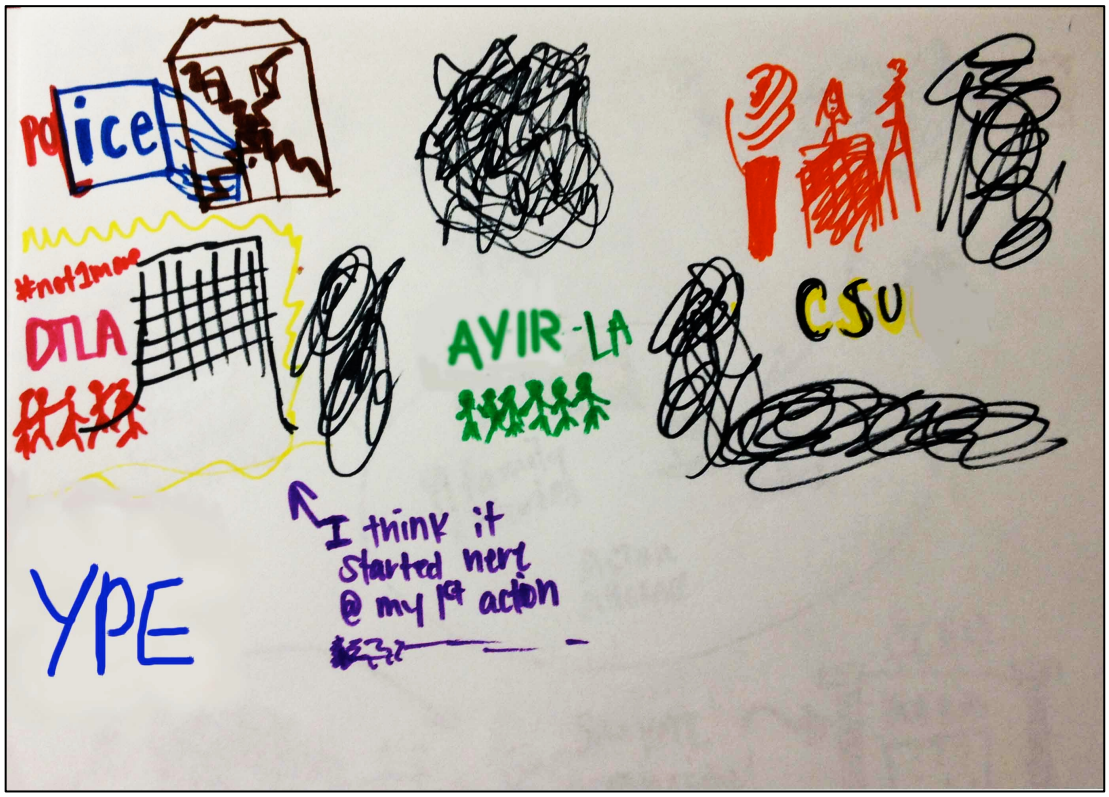
Thea came over to the U.S. from the Philippines at the age of six to join her parents. She grew up in a lower-middle class household in a California metropolitan area, not quite knowing about her immigration status and identifying as Filipina American. Now she is highly critical of the U.S. and prefers to identify as Pinay and with her home city, as opposed to identifying as American, which she has experienced as a distinction rooted in violence and oppression. She is a leader in local immigrant youth organizations (AYIR [Asian Youth for Immigration Reform] and Cali Dreamers[26]) but has also been feeling burnt out and critical of social justice organizing spaces and culture. In our conversations she talked multiple times about the impact of colonization on her, her family, and the Philippines and is questioning how to actively

[26] Pseudonyms used to protect the identity of participants.

decolonize herself and whether it is possible. She is also critical of the gender dynamics at work and in other organizations and has started speaking out along with Red and other female interns.

I interpret Thea's Activist Map (below) as more of a brainstorm map than a linear map. When she explained her map to me, she focused on the one particular direct action that catalyzed her towards activism, as a result of her parents' detention. This is illustrated in the two pictures at the top left and middle left of the page. However, she also described the conversations she had with organizers in the immigrant youth movement, and the support from her relatives, that really helped her to feel ready to fight back. Later in our interview, she pointed at the cloud of scribbles in the top middle section of the page to illustrate how chaotic those ten months were for her.

Figure 4. Thea's Activist Map



FINDINGS

In considering my research questions, I focus on three noteworthy themes related to resistance that emerged from the analysis:

1) Making it in America: Challenging and Redefining Narratives of Success and Assimilation
2) Silences on Gender and Sexuality in Social Justice Spaces
3) Entering the Workplace: Uncovering Non-Profit Contradictions

The first section relates to my participants' navigation of particular expectations of success and assimilation, which they largely attribute to their families and family histories but also connect to broader themes of Asian migration to the U.S. and growing up in the U.S. I examine their efforts to rearticulate (to themselves, their families, and me) their own narratives of success and existence in the U.S. in ways that aligned with their values and desires.

Section two focuses on a theme, "Silences on gender and sexuality," that resonated strongly with the two young women who participated in my study, and represented a constant negotiation in social justice spaces. Their resistance here highlights their own meaning making of complex and oftentimes highly frustrating contradictions in social justice spaces.

The third section hones in more specifically on my participants' internship experience within APIC, which unearths many questions and perceived contradictions related to non-profit organizations. I focus in particular on the impact their experience and resistance have on their relationship to APIC.

I address my research questions in all sections, though section one applies more to RQ1 and sections two and three apply to both RQ1 and RQ2, as these sections underscore a tension between participants' resistance and contradictions in their internship program (and social justice spaces more generally).

SECTION 1. Making it in America:[27] Challenging and Redefining Narratives of Success and Assimilation

Throughout my interviews, the concept of "success" showed up, again and again. Red, my first interviewee, initially clued me into this theme near the end of our first interview, when I asked her a concluding question: "is there anything else you think I should know right now?" Red took the opportunity to explain the challenges that she had in high school, and presented a critique of school as solely focused on success through academic achievement. The turn of topic was pleasantly surprising, and I took note of this resonant critique of "success." As I continued with my interviews with other participants, I noticed convergent critiques that incorporated financial security, assimilation, and careers.

What are "narratives of success and assimilation?" In this section, I use this term to capture the varied and overlapping narratives that my participants shared – narratives that touch on family migration, American-ness and whiteness, and the American dream, and are also shaped by race and ethnicity. I describe how these narratives conclude with a particular definition of success and assimilation, which Red, Brandon, and Thea challenge with nuance. I then distinguish ways in which my participants seek to rearticulate a new, more flexible definition of success and a different way of being in the U.S. as a young 1.5 and second

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[27] In this thesis and section I use both "American" and "the U.S." but prefer to use "the U.S." when possible. Some have proposed "United Statesian" or "USian" instead of "American" to refer to citizens and residents of the United States of America, given that the "Americas" refers to the continental landmass including North, South and Central America (Safire, 1986). However, the popular usage of "American," "American Dream," and "Asian American" carry particular cultural and/or political meanings that are discussed in this section, making it difficult to remove American from my terminology entirely.

generation Asian American. In doing so, they strategically resist dominant narratives and ideologies. At the same time, it is important to notice their corresponding unease and ambivalence about challenging these narratives.

Identifying Narratives of Success and Assimilation

Participants identified family narratives of success, emphasizing the experience of mediating between family expectations for their career and future, and their own interests and desires. They were quick to identify their parents' and family's definitions of success as having a strong emphasis on academic and financial success, as Brandon shared: "All they care about is like you go to school and get straight A's, and then you make good money." This was echoed by Thea, who also commented, "There's pressures all the time to assimilate or be successful or make lots of money. And that's how they see success as." Similarly, Red stated, "My aunts and uncles, their idea of assimilation is to get a good job after you graduate from college." She continued, "College means a route to a job, and therefore a route to success, or having a lot of money." Having an acceptable career was also important, Brandon noted: "If you're doing good in school, it's like good, become a doctor or a lawyer."

Brandon in particular was attuned to this pressure from his parents and noted similarities with the model minority stereotype about Asian parents. In the following quote, Brandon describes the tension between his passion for filmmaking and his parent's expectations and priorities.

> I wanna go and I want to pursue something in film- whether or not it's TV, whether or not it's web video, whether or not it's film. My parents don't care. They care as long as you get good grades and you're making money. That's what it boils down to. And like Asian American stereotypes of parents. […] But if you

> don't fall along the lines of, you're getting straight A's, and you're not making money, then they start to be like, "then what are you doing?"

Brandon describes his parents' strong focus on good grades and making "good money" with the "Asian American stereotype of parents." Though his parents are not outright opposed to his interest in filmmaking, Brandon feels the expectation from his parents to focus on the bottom line of academic and financial success. As a Cambodian American growing up with Cambodian immigrant refugee parents, he also alludes to a generational difference in priorities between growing up in the U.S. and arriving as an immigrant refugee. In this sense, his family's expectations are intimately tied to their family histories and migration stories.

When I asked Brandon about how his parents' experiences in Cambodia impacted how he was raised, he commented:

> I think the biggest thing is that they always emphasized education. A lot. And…you know, them coming here, they wanted that I get an education. That I get a job, essentially. They saw that besides having to escape Cambodia because of certain things that's happening with my dad, um, they came here so we can have the freedom to do – get a job, get rich. All those things that you know, people said, coming to America would promise them this. So that's what I think maybe my family, my mom and dad saw coming here. Um, and my dad worked those extra hours just to get us here.

In this response, America is woven with the promise of freedom and upward mobility through steady jobs and educational opportunity. The American promise is deeply embedded in Brandon's parents' dreams, which we will continue to see Brandon contend with. Brandon's freedom to pursue this promise is contrasted with the persecution his family fled from. Brandon tells me his parents left Cambodia as refugees when Vietnamese troops occupied Cambodia and ousted the Khmer Rouge, fearing that his father's military assistance to the U.S. during the Vietnam War would put their family in danger. Brandon recalls a conversation with his mother,

in which she shares that his father sought out the U.S. specifically, leveraging the contacts that his father had to ensure a refugee placement in America.

> My mom told me it was tough trying to immigrate and all that, when um when::: my dad was in the refugee camp in Thailand, he made it a point to try and contact the people he used to work with in the U.S. Him helping Vietnam-era, you know teaching U.S. soldiers about the jungle and stuff like that how to tell the difference between Cambodian and Vietnamese. It was – he made sure we got to the U.S. and not anywhere else.

Though Brandon did not elaborate on the reasoning behind his father's decision, this story, as told to Brandon by his mother, builds upon their family narrative of coming to the U.S. and seeking freedom and prosperity. This family narrative, overlaid with the model minority stereotype, shapes Brandon's understanding of his family's emphasis on certain types of success, and makes him feel like his dream of being a filmmaker diverges from this definition of success.

Despite Brandon's disappointment with his parent's lack of interest in his filmmaking, he also acknowledges the opportunities he has in the U.S. to pursue this interest. At one point in our interview, he commented, "If we lived in Cambodia […] I would have been – I don't know, assuming – trying to get a job doing something else. I wouldn't be wanting to do film. I had to do something to survive. You know? Survival was a big deal. And still is a big deal in that country." In this sense, Brandon recognizes the privilege of even being able to pursue a passion for filmmaking in the U.S., in contrast to his imagined life of survival in Cambodia. Additionally, he contextualizes his parents' emphasis on academic and financial success by understanding his family narratives, which adds complexity to his earlier generalization that his parents fit an Asian American model minority stereotype.

Thea also felt pressure from her family to succeed, which was intimately tied with a pressure to assimilate into U.S. society. As an immigrant Pinxy family growing up with the

legacy of American colonization, they were keenly aware of the intersections of success and cultural assimilation. Thea invokes conceptions of success, assimilation, and money interchangeably:

> It's just like my family's an immigrant family, and like the history of the Philippines being colonized by America, they feel like here, they come here, they need to be like, just like Americans. And so they feel even more like a pressure and a need to assimilate and to be like accepted, and so that's why they're like, always do well in school, always learn English, and I guess that's another reason they're like talk properly or talk white. There's pressures all the time to assimilate or be successful or make lots of money. And that's how they see success as.

Thea draws connections between forms of assimilation and doing well in school – such that doing well in school and being successful are key markers of successful assimilation. She also traces the pressure to assimilate, to become "just like Americans," back to her parents' lives in the Philippines, where American-ness was highly valued. The pressure to become Americans is further intensified by family's status as undocumented immigrants and is starkly contrasted by the legal barriers to becoming U.S. citizens. Indeed, Thea's family may mitigate the stress and fear of possible deportation by placing a strong emphasis on proving American-ness and establishing financial security.

Like Brandon, Thea finds tension in her plans for employment and her family's expectations for her success. During our focus group reflection, Thea shares:

> The pressure is really bad, but then also like understanding from their point of view and what they went through – I guess what I went through too. Like we went all the way here, and you're just going to work – you're just going to work in a non-profit. I don't know. It's like understanding their point of view, but also like, um, yeah, you're not going to be happy about doing – being a doctor, or making lots of money.

She goes on to tie her parent's emphasis on jobs and employment to her family's migration history:

> I think like, the reason why we moved here – well, the more I think about it, it's that like the reason why we're here really – it is because of economic reasons, but its also – it's just like ironically your dignity, and just being able to be a human being. And being free to do what you want. I think it's different for my family, but I think that's what it is. I think for my parents to come here, I think it is more like, yeah for economic reasons. And not be unemployed in the Philippines."

In these comments, Thea alternates between her parent's perspective and her own perspective, demonstrating her thought process in recognizing the motivations behind her parents' expectations as well as her own consideration for working at a non-profit or not becoming a doctor. Interestingly, both Brandon and Thea invoke freedom in reflecting on immigration, family employment and financial success. Thea alludes to two interlaced motivations for migration, seeking dignity and freedom, while also seeking better economic opportunity and employment. She seems to find these factors to be at odds with each other at times, explaining her family's emphasis on success and certain careers in describing them as being more motivated by economic reasons, perhaps contrasted by Thea's activism as an undocumented young person fighting for dignity and her preference to continue her activism through her internship and involvement in other organizations.[28]

My participants' explanation of a heavy emphasis on success overlaps to a degree with Lee and Zhou's (J. Lee, 2012a; 2014; Zhou & Lee, 2014) assertion that Chinese immigrant and

[28] Interestingly, Thea evokes some of the core values and logics of neoliberalism, with supporters touting neoliberalism's propagation of individual freedom and economic opportunity and prosperity. However, the freedoms and economic prosperity of neoliberal economic systems also come at the expense of a large majority of people – what David Harvey calls "accumulation by dispossession" (2004, 2005). Thea's discussion of human dignity points to this contradiction of true "freedom."

Vietnamese refugee parents[29] articulate a similarly strict "success frame," which amounts to "getting straight As in high school, attaining a degree in a prestigious university, and securing a well-paying job in one of the four coveted professions: science, engineering, medicine, and law" (2014, p. 8321).[30] Indeed, my participants did identify medicine and law as highly desirable professions in their parent's eyes and Brandon in particular described an expectation for straight A's. However, my participants also clearly identified a bottom line of economic incentive; meaning success was tied to expectations and hopes of employment, making money and getting rich, and financial security. For Thea, her family's status as undocumented immigrants modified her parent's emphasis on assimilation as success in addition to economic success.

However, Lee (2012a) generalizes a tendency among 1.5- and second-generation Chinese and Vietnamese students who do not fit the strict success frame to reject their ethnic and racial identities or consider themselves not Asian enough, as opposed to rejecting the success frame as a construct. In contrast, the rest of this section details the ways in which Red, Thea, and Brandon actively resist and critique this narrative of success, and endeavor to redefine it.

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[29] This assertion comes out of a study of 1.5- and second-generation adult children of Chinese immigrants and Vietnamese refugees. Their examples are drawn from adults in their 30's, though, so it would be interesting to examine whether this assessment of professional success has shifted for immigrant and refugee parents in the present.

[30] That said, I have reservations about the applicability of the "success frame" concept as an explanation more broadly for "Asian Americans' exceptional educational outcomes," (J. Lee, 2012b; Zhou & Lee, 2014, p. 8321) as it may not map evenly across ethnic groups. Teranishi (2002), for example, has noted the impact of institutional factors and school racial climate on educational process, student achievement, and academic expectations. He found that Chinese and Filipino students experienced stark differences in their teacher and counselors' academic expectations for them based on whether they fit the model minority stereotype (Chinese students were perceived to fit, whereas Filipino students were not), affecting their attitudes towards postsecondary education. Additionally, Lee and Zhou fail to account for how the viability of this success frame may intersect with the anti-black and anti-civil rights movement, racial-political interest-convergent (1980) dimensions of the model minority narrative, as described by historians of this narrative (Osajima, 2005; Wu, 2014).

Redefining and Resisting Success

My participants went beyond identifying family narratives of success to articulate alternate interpretations of success that more accurately reflected their values and priorities. At times these redefinitions included meeting some of their family's expectations, while other times they felt like they were rebelling against these notions of success and assimilation. In particular, participants emphasized happiness as a goal, in contrast to money and career. As Brandon questioned, "Sure you did it to make your parents happy, but are you yourself happy in this line of work?"

In our first interview, Red provided a candid reflection on her own decision-making around careers and money - an intimate picture of her own internal de-programming and potentially conflicting beliefs and needs.

> I just wanna make sure I have a stable job. I guess growing up low-income, I can see how money is always the root of the problem in a way. Having too much- I don't know- I just see people being stubborn with money, and I learned that stubbornness too, and…I just don't want to – I'm trying to de-stress myself into believing that money isn't always everything, money isn't always happiness. But at the same time, I'm kind of confused because money does give you that security and you do need security every once in a while.

Money isn't always everything – but money is sometimes security. Red's discussion with herself at this moment presents a multitude of interpretations of her relationship to money as a marker of success and as a necessity. She also alludes to the ways in which class and socioeconomic status influences her perspective on money and success, identifying money as the "root of the problem," including the emphasis her family puts on career and financial security. Red indicates that the topic in general creates some stress for her, acknowledging that she does not want to become so stressed or "stubborn" about money that she loses sight of happiness.

During our focus group, Red characterizes these expectations from her family with the model minority myth framework. She states, "With the model minority myth, […] what bugs me is that when I don't play the part, my mom challenges me or sees that I'm not playing the part. She's like oh, but I heard about this family, and the daughter bought her mom a house and they're living together." She attempts to opt-out of participating in the model minority myth, but indicates that she feels pressured by her mom's expectations and comments. "It doesn't help out when she references other people doing that who have participated in the model minority myth. And they have, or they did, become a doctor or a lawyer." Red's use of the verb "participated" distinguishes individuals who have, on some level, decided to take part in the model minority myth, whereas Red is less eager to do so. She implies some of her choices are a conscious rejection of the model minority role, but also identifies her mother's role in reinforcing this narrative. In particular, Red's mother hopes that Red will be able to buy her a house, which Red mentioned a few times throughout my interviews and observations. Homeownership, however, not only increases financial security, but could also be viewed as a performance of the American dream and U.S. citizenship, as Eric Pido theorizes in his study of Filipinx immigrant homeowners in Daly City (2012). Viewed through this lens, Red's mother's comparisons of Red with other children also measures how well Red fits into a particular American and Asian American narrative. Red shared with me a desire to help her mother move out of an apartment and reduce stressful financial struggles, while also expressing uncertainty about her mother's expectations that she embody a model minority and dutiful daughter role.

At other times, Red pushes back against messages she receives from her family about financial security and assimilation. In doing so, Red, and the other participants, are not resisting success, per say. Rather, they are articulating alternate forms and definitions of success,

effectively rewriting their own narratives of assimilation in contrast to their parents' narratives. These narratives of assimilation were also often racialized, gendered, and classed, sometimes explicitly and sometimes covertly. During our interview[31], Red recalled a recent encounter she had with her aunt, in which she starts to challenge family messages and pressures to assimilate in specific ways as a young Chinese American female (whose family comes from the Chinese diaspora in Vietnam and Cambodia):

> Red: She said "Don't ever date a Mexican, don't do that. If you are ever to date someone or marry someone – [Red], marry a Chinese man or a – maybe Vietnamese, and a white man. White man is good, white man is good. Because you know they can take care of you." [pauses, then laughs]
>
> Cathy: What did you say? How did that feel?
>
> Red: I---wanted to cry. [Laughs.] But I did manage to say something. Um, it wasn't – the way I termed it wasn't worded very well, but I managed to say something for the first time. And I actually said, "To be honest, I don't think I'll ever date a white man, because from my experiences, I haven't been treated very well from a white man. And I don't think – I have seen patterns where – they can't really understand where I'm coming from and who I am, so I can't really see myself having commonalties with a white man."

Red's aunt doesn't address Red's comment about white men in her response, but Red speculates that her aunt thinks Red will simply marry a Chinese man instead. Red interprets this interaction

[31] Red was responding to a follow-up question I had asked after she mentioned assimilation through ESL as part of a larger Asian American experience: "just going back to ESL and the ways that people are expected to assimilate into American culture, what are other ways that you've felt that, or what are ways that you've experienced that?"

as more than dating advice from her aunt – she connects it to a larger pattern of "white assimilation," as she later calls it. I later learn that her current partner is a non-Asian man of color, adding to the discomfort she might have felt in hearing her aunt's advice. Additionally, Red considers this pressure to assimilate to be directly connected to financial security. "I just feel like with my relatives from my mom's side, they see white men as the savior for the women," adding, "that really disturbs me." She elaborates:

> Whenever they talk about their partners, it's always about financial stuff- like "oh yeah him and I are saving – we saved a lot of money to buy our house." Or "I know that being with him I'm financially secure." It's always words like that. So I feel from my mom's side of the family, they see white men as the savior – the financial savior. So yeah, that's another white assimilation experience: to be mindful to date a white person for financial reasons.

In referring to white men as "financial saviors," Red articulates the connection between white maleness and financial security for many of her female family members. She suggests that one of their primary concerns is in obtaining financial security, and thus associate their choice of a partner with a pathway to success. Later on in the interview Red qualifies her earlier statement, saying, "I can see that because of the way that they grew up, with food stamps, no wonder they […] say that these white men tend to be saviors, financial saviors." She can understand where her family is coming from to a certain extent, but also continues to contest the message. "I can see the flaw in their statements – their white assimilation statements. And so although […] they talk about it a lot to me, I don't give in. Because I can see right through it." Though Red reveals here the impact that class may have on creating or limiting female relatives' dating options, she also alludes to frustration with racist/orientalist dynamics of a white "savior." Red voices her defiance of this mode of assimilation by naming and or calling out the "white assimilation" pressures present in her relatives' comments.

This example that Red shared with me was significant in that she identified it as one of the first times where she made a decision to challenge a family member's assimilation statements. As she explained it:

> I remember every time I go to a social event with my cousins back then, every time I try to start a conversation another person overstepped my voice, and I just shut down. It was always like that with my cousins and my aunts, um, sometimes my uncles. And my mom too. […] Yeah and like they make me feel like I don't have the words – make me feel like I [don't] have the potential to form words to challenge what they're saying. But right now, I'm trying to be more confident, with my family, with my relatives, trying to challenge them. Um, have the right words. This is pretty new for me to try and do that with them.

Red articulated a process of finding her voice – starting to challenge her family members and their comments about assimilation, to find the "right words" to use and the right time. Throughout our interviews, Red had identified challenges in confronting family members with different perspectives from hers – denoting them by color in her Activist Map and describing additional interactions with her cousins, aunts, and mother that went against her social justice values. In fact, Red commented that even "if you see something and it's a red alert, you can be critical first," meaning that you do not need to understand social justice to feel like something is wrong. But she also added, "you can learn social justice terms and it will give you the confidence to want to challenge." Through social justice programs, reading articles online, and later through college classes, Red was able to gain a better understanding of both the experiences she had and also the words to describe them, giving her the "right words" to use. This allowed her to build up the confidence to start challenging her relatives.

In Red's discussion of her experience resisting assimilationist pressures and a focus solely on financial security, she pushes back against assumptions and ideological statements

from her family members. At the same time, she also describes how difficult emotionally it has been to attempt to confront their statements. She conveys a longing for the "right words" to speak up, to help her build her confidence, after being made to feel she does not have the right words. In particular, Red's anecdotes highlight a strong connection between assimilation, whiteness, and money, understood as assimilationist behaviors and closeness to whiteness as financially beneficial. Additionally, she highlights a strong emphasis on success as being primarily financial success. Red resists both of these articulations of success and assimilation, even if she is still looking for the right words.

Brandon, on the other hand, articulates his resistance to his parents' expectations as "proving them [his parents] wrong," while still being strategic. As I described earlier, Brandon feels the most tension with his parents around different career expectations – feeling pressure from his parents to become a doctor or lawyer, whereas Brandon wants to work in the film industry. In our interview, Brandon talked about rebelliousness,[32] commenting:

> I think almost everything I do [is rebellious]. [laughs] Pursuing a career in film could be one of them. Um doing anything…what my parents don't expect me to do. Like the model minority. The Asian model minority. If I don't fall along with that, then my parents are like why do you do it anyways?

Despite feeling rebellious, however, Brandon also sees a need for a strategic-but-accommodating approach to his parent's model minority expectations, stating, "the thing about stereotypes is that you kind of have to play by their rules." Because, according to Brandon, "My thing is if you don't play by the game on their terms, they probably don't understand it. You know? For me I

[32] Brandon made a comment about rebelling against his parents' restrictions against any kind of sports by sneaking out to play airsoft (a paintball-like activity that he does with his friends). I followed up with a question asking what else he did that could be considered rebellious, leading to his answer in the quote.

kind of had to like play the role, get straight A's and show them, okay, maybe he is trying to do something with his life." At the same time, Brandon remains steadfast in his determination to pursue film. "I want to be happy," he stated. "I'm going to prove you, I'm going to make something of this." Brandon's process of resistance and rebellion involves pursuing his passion despite what his parents expect, while identifying what can persuade his parents to be more supportive and working to make that a reality. Thus he juxtaposes his "rebellious" pursuit of a career in film with his efforts to appease his parents by getting good grades, and "playing the role" of the model minority. Like Red, he poses the model minority as a performance and a decision to play the role or not play the role. Additionally, he once again relates his parents' perspectives to the model minority stereotype about Asian parents and indicates that this stereotype is actually something that gives him a guide to understand his parents' expectations. In this sense, Brandon has a tendency to take stereotypes as fixed and representative, but he sees himself using that to his advantage in "playing the game."

Brandon's approach highlights the navigational aspects of resistance, in that it can involve a deft negotiation of resistance and accommodation to dominant structures and ideologies (as represented by a connection to a larger race and class-based role of the model minority in a hierarchal race and class structure). In Solórzano and Delgado Bernal's matrix, Brandon's approach would likely be considered "conformist resistance," particularly since it literally involves strategically and consciously conforming to become a content-maker who can raise awareness of Asian American issues. Brandon seems the most confident that he can meet his parents' expectations, which aligns with his strategy to cater to his parents' interest in order to pursue his own. His approach, though, is moderate by his own definition, rather than an outright challenge to dominant norms.

For Thea, her parents' expectations were strongly tied to a pressure to assimilate to American-ness both for financial security and safety, given their status as undocumented immigrants. Thea described to me a process of shifting from considering herself an American to rejecting that marker. In our initial emails about my research, Thea made clear to me that she did not identify as Asian American – she identified as an "Asian (PI) IN America" (PI referring to Pacific Islander). She wrote: "it's mostly through my experiences as an undocumented Pinay that identifying with the word "America" has caused more trauma and pain to me and therefore I don't consider myself as an Asian American." Her perspectives here define and redefine American identity as a source of "trauma and pain," rather than pride. Her distinction here between being Asian American and being an Asian or Asian Pacific Islander in America also reveals a tension in the racial-political category of "Asian American." Thea indirectly also challenges the assumption that people of Asian descent in the U.S. should embrace this distinction of American citizenship.

When I followed up in our interview, she explained, "I did consider myself an American before. Because the way like a lot of I think undocumented Asian families are - they don't necessarily tell you you're undocumented like straight up." Consequently, Thea identified with an American identity. "I didn't know initially that I was undocumented, and you know in school, pledging allegiance to the flag, that kind of ritualistic thing that makes you like feel like you are part of America and therefore you're American, sort of thing." She recalled, "So definitely, there was a time when like, yeah, [I believed in the] American dream and stuff, and like "America!" [said with enthusiasm]. But that definitely shifted when I experienced a lot of like- I feel like America revealed itself to me."

Thea is referring to summer of 2013; the summer her parents were first detained and jailed. Thea realizes her family will never be accepted as Americans, despite her embrace of the identity previously. Thea identifies the role of school in assimilating students to a national identity and comments specifically that she believed in narratives like the American dream. Notably, America is revealed to be an oppressive and dehumanizing state rather than a source of security and opportunity, after which Thea loses her investment in an American identity and experiences a shift in consciousness. Now she prefers to identify as Pinay, an immigrant, and as a resident of the California city she grew up in.

Despite this shift from Filipina American to Filipina/Pinay in her personal identity, Thea feels that her parents have continued to strive to be considered Americans. For Thea, challenging this American identity is connected to a larger critique of American imperialism: "Cause they're [Thea's parents] always like, 'we're Americans, we're Americans too.' Um, but I think that that speaks to a lot of the imperialism and the colonization that the Philippines went through." Thea feels that aspiring to an American identity "happens also at the expense of erasing our native and indigenous culture," as well as actively giving up their Filipin@ identity. Thea explains:

> "So I guess like they feel like, it's like, I don't know how to put it, it's almost like, 'oh I worked hard, and I did this and I lived here for a certain time, and therefore I should be American.' Like it's the goal. But oftentimes when they say that they don't want to identify as Filipina, they want to identify as either like American – just American or Filipino Americans. I don't know, and for me it just sort of hurts to see that because there's so little effort to make being Filipino a goal, than making American a goal, and like, they see it in a sense as having so much economic value of like going to work all the time, and making lots of money, and that's like American, *but what about the deeper roots that we have?*"

Thea challenges her parents' perspective (or her perception of their perspective) that being American is a higher priority than being Filipin@. Given their immigration status, being

American could indeed be the greatest guarantee of security, much like marrying a white man could be an indicator of security for Red. However, after Thea's traumatic experience with her parents' detention, "America revealed itself" to her, allowing her to see the true meaning of American-ness. She laments losing their roots and culture, all for a pursuit of American-ness in an America that does not want them.

Informed by her experience as an undocumented immigrant youth activist, Thea continues to challenge definitions of American identity and pushes back against a pressure to assimilate to American-ness and to fight for citizenship. When I asked her what American meant to her, Thea responded: "I think American means, I think it means – I mean, this is my definition. I think for me it means privilege – because of like – and in my experience, at the expense of other people, and the oppression of other peoples." While other undocumented activists might fight for the right to become American citizens, Thea also rejects this as the ultimate goal.

> Jose Antonio Vargas, he has this whole campaign of "Define American." I guess his whole argument is like [challenging sentiment like] 'oh you immigrants aren't Americans.' And stuff like that. And I don't know, sometimes I don't feel like defining American because it's constantly defining itself for me on like a daily basis. […]
>
> It's weird, when you're in the immigrant rights movement, you fight for like same rights as Americans. But I don't know, that doesn't necessarily mean you wanna be American. I think that's basically like treating me as a human being and not deport people and not separate families. […]
>
> And maybe that in turn would redefine American. I don't know.

In other words, striving for the security of American-ness that her parents desire means entering into a system that privileges others at undocumented immigrants' expense everyday. Thus Thea

reimagines her activism as not necessarily striving for American-ness but for human dignity in America. In addition to challenging the desire to be American or the privilege and oppression of others that comes with being American, Thea also challenges the category of citizenship as a conferrer of certain rights or privileges and legitimation of dehumanization.[33] Perhaps if she and others are successful, she wonders, that could change the meaning of American for the better. American would no longer mean privilege at the expense of oppressing others.

Thea's narrative demonstrates the assumed financial benefits and security of assimilation towards American-ness and her rejection of this commonsense assumption. In discussing with me her desire to reclaim her Pinay roots, she attempts to resist the ideological violence of what she calls a "colonized mind." At the same time, she is frank about the pain and disconnect of witnessing her parents be detained and still striving for American-ness.

Notably, Zhou and Lee (2014) propose that this success frame is not an innate element of Asian culture, but is rather a product of a "belief that upward social mobility is possible in the U.S.," and a prediction that education is the key to a favorable profession, which is the key to success (2014, p. 8322). This suggests, as Thea in particular noted, a key element of these expectations of success (though not explicit) are rooted not just in economic opportunity in the U.S. but also in the cultural contents of American-ness, including an emphasis on hard work, meritocracy, and a belief in American dream. These themes resound in the fundamental assumptions of meritocracy in the model minority narrative, as numerous scholars have described (Hurh & Kim, 1989; S. J. Lee, 1996; Ngo & Lee, 2007; Osajima, 1988; Wu, 2014).

[33] Though I did not have the opportunity to ask Thea about this, I wondered if Thea would expand her critique to challenge the category of citizenship overall. For instance, her claim to the right to be treated as a human being has echoes from Monisha Das Gupta's framing of South Asian immigrant activism as "transnational processes" of searching for rights as migrants – rights that are "*not* contingent on citizenship," redefining meanings of state borders and citizenship altogether (2006, p. 26).

Not only do my participants' critiques and rearticulations of success and assimilation actively challenge a family-imposed success frame, they also work to expose underlying ideologies and narratives that permeate these narratives of success and its linkages with the model minority and assimilationist strategies – including the privileging of whiteness and American-ness, dominant ideologies permeating U.S. society. Thus, as Red asserts, they "see through" these frames of success.

Assimilation and success narratives provide an intriguing canvas to highlight my participants' differing practices and approaches to resistance. All of my participants acknowledge that narratives like the model minority and American dream (despite being myths) create constraints for their family's expectations, "acceptable" careers, and definitions of success, similar to Lee and Zhou's (2014) explanation of strict "success frames." However, they choose to challenge and resist these narratives in different ways. Red, for instance, has attempted to directly challenge assimilationist and normative comments that her relatives make to her or in her presence. She brings intentionality to her resistance, practicing and preparing to respond to comments, choosing the right moments, and challenging herself to speak up with her more vocal relatives. Brandon, on the other hand, negotiates for the opportunity to pursue his dream of filmmaking by following through on getting good grades – something he knows his parents will approve of. He refers to this as "playing the game." Thus he is able to navigate his parents' expectations, proving to them that he has ability to succeed. Additionally, he adamantly advocates for a success that is defined by happiness rather than wealth. Thea's resistance, alternatively, lies in her rejection of an American identity and narrative of success that has been perpetuated by U.S. imperialism and colonialism and is echoed by her parents. Following her

family's experience with ICE and state-sanctioned violence in the name of American citizenship, Thea loses faith in the American dream and is catalyzed into action against institutions like ICE. Subsequently, she seeks to reclaim and decolonize Pinay identity and history.

However, Red, Brandon, and Thea also experience uncertainty in their rearticulation, particularly in the impact that redefinition of success and assimilation has on their future. Faced with a choice of one vision of success and another, or one vision of assimilation and justice and another, choosing an alternative that goes against family expectations weighs heavily on their relationship to their families. In this sense, their resistance sometimes causes further uncertainty or ambivalence. At other times, they are able to resist by leveraging critical understandings to make sense of their own situations and their families' situations. For instance, Red gains confidence to speak up through learning more about social justice issues, Brandon learns to better understand and relate to his parents by learning about stereotypes, and Thea rapidly politicizes in response to her parents' detention. In providing opportunities to develop these ideas and understandings, APIC may help to facilitate their conscious resistance. Additionally, Red, Brandon, and Thea's resistance responds to and is influenced by intersecting experiences of ethnicity, race, class, gender, and citizenship, as well as their family's migration histories and trauma. Whether it is the pressure Red experiences to marry a white man and achieve a middle class life with her mother, or the motivation and beliefs that drove Brandon's parents to seek out the U.S. in particular, or Thea's parents' perseverance in striving to become "American," these young people hold compassion for their parent(s) and families' struggle to achieve success and security in the U.S., while seeking a new vision of success for themselves.

Robin Kelley (2014) calls for youth resistance scholarship to attend not just to youth resistance, but also youth theorizing. Indeed, in resisting narratives of success and assimilation,

as well as the model minority stereotype, my participants attempt to rearticulate and rethink the role of these narratives in their lives. For Red and Brandon, an insistence on other forms of success help them to recognize and resist a performance of the model minority stereotype. For Thea, she critiques advocacy that seeks entry into American citizenship as it is now, an exclusive and oppressive status, and instead envisions a new meaning and definition for American. Thus, my participants' moments of resistance can also be recognized as moments of theorizing, adding dimension to an understanding of how Red, Thea, and Brandon resist dominant ideologies.

SECTION 2. Silences on Gender and Sexuality in Social Justice Spaces

During one of my supplemental observations at APIC, I observed a training session on social justice facilitation – one session in a series of workshops designed for interns to develop skills needed for their facilitation of social justice-oriented high school programs. Dawn, the program coordinator, encouraged the interns to not just think about their own identities while facilitating, but to also take note of power dynamics within the groups they facilitated. In particular, Dawn challenged the interns to pay attention to power dynamics in relation to social identity categories, such as race, ethnicity, gender, class, education status, age, immigration status, ability, and sexuality.

> Dawn asked the group, "Why is it important for facilitators to be attuned to power differences in a group?" Sam comments, "facilitators need to make sure they check their privilege" otherwise their "ego" (as a facilitator) can get in the way. Dawn nods, affirming that yes, it is important for a facilitator to be self-aware. Now what about group dynamics? "What can happen if the facilitator is not attuned to power differences within the group?" Red shares that if a participant's ego is becoming an issue, then she as a facilitator would encourage the group to remember that they should "problem solve together to find a solution," not just have one person dominating.
>
> Dawn continues to probe. If there are certain people dominating, "what informs that?" Carlos suggests "body language" is important to notice because it can contribute to someone dominating a group. Dawn rephrases: "What could lead to power dynamics forming in a group?" Another intern mentions there may be cliques and posses within the group. Dawn asks, but "what leads to cliques and posses" forming within a group? I hide a smile, knowing this dance of patience and tugging. I glance around, and catch Thea sharing a glance with her neighbor Meliza. I suspect she has an idea of what Dawn is getting at.
>
> Finally, someone starts us off. "Education?" Dawn nods. "Education, definitely. What else?" Tip, a young Black man, says "gender." Dawn nods again.

> Brandon calls out "age." Dawn agrees, age definitely. "…Everything from the privilege wheel!" Huy shouts, realizing the connection with a previous activity. "Everything from the privilege wheel!" exclaims Dawn, There we go! The group laughs. Dawn summarizes, this is why it's important to think about "facilitating from a social justice perspective." It's about "prioritizing equalizing power dynamics" in a group.
>
> Thea raises her hand to make a comment. She says she was thinking about gender, but "I wanted someone else to bring it up first." She tells the group that it's not often talked about in this group, and it's something she sees as a power dynamic that plays out in this group and other groups and programs. She says it often "gets ignored" and "it's the last thing people want to talk about," even though they'll talk about race and other forms of power. (Field Notes)

Dawn affirmed Thea's comment and thanked her for raising the issue. Soon after, Dawn moved the group to the next topic of the session.

As this opening quote exemplifies, this section focuses on Red and Thea's ongoing resistance against sexism, male privilege, and minimization of gender issues. First I present Red and Thea's description and analysis of the gender dynamics and silences they encounter at APIC. Then I examine Red and Thea's efforts to hold the office and intern cohort accountable to a vision of social justice that is explicit about gender justice, and the pushback they encounter. I conclude with a discussion of the emotional impact these efforts have on Red and Thea.

Encountering Gender Dynamics

When I came to APIC, I was interested in the ways in which the youth interns challenged dominant narratives on Asians and Asian Americans, and I was curious what pedagogies APIC employed in their youth leadership programs. Having the privilege of being in queer and women-centered spaces for most of the last ten years, I did not fully anticipate that gender would arise so

often in my interviews as a salient identity, particularly in comparison to how often race or ethnicity seemed to come up as a salient identity.[34] Time and time again, my female participants, Thea and Red, noted the silence on gender and sexuality in multiple forms and forums at APIC, and more generally in the "social justice spaces"[35] they participated in. In many ways, it seemed that Thea and Red were just as surprised and confused – they recognized a contradiction between the social justice values these spaces espoused and their experience of the dismissal of, and lack of interest in, addressing gender oppression.

During the social justice facilitation workshop, the program coordinator and facilitator of the session, Dawn, encouraged the interns to discuss and acknowledge how power dynamics play out in their work with high schoolers. The interns required several guiding questions in order to open up discussion on power dynamics within groups, though they were quick to note the power dynamic between a facilitator and student groups. However, Thea, in her comment, pushed the group to acknowledge gender dynamics both in student groups and in their intern group, stating that dynamics often "get ignored" by the other interns. When I followed up with Thea during our interview, she added, "Dawn's my supervisor and we talk about that [gender] a lot and [clears throat] and I think she was asking specifically about identity dynamics and stuff like that

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[34] I attended a four year historically women's college and have worked with LGBTQ youth for the majority of my career thus far. That said, I am not necessarily surprised, having experienced some culture shock upon entering a straight/male/cis dominated graduate program, and being familiar with historical and ongoing dismissal of gender justice and perpetuation of gender oppression in social movements.

[35] I use "social justice spaces" to refer to the programs and organizations that the participants are involved in that advance a social justice-related mission; however, a group or organization's vision of "social justice" may differ from others. This is a term that came from my participants: Thea referred to groups as "social justice spaces" while Red and Brandon discussed the programs as spaces in which they learned about social justice issues. Red often labeled individuals as "social justice people" or variations thereof (social justice instructor, social justice activist), and Thea also used this term at times.

and then like other people were giving other answers. And I was like, c'mon guys!!" Additionally, she commented she was "trying to think positive about a lot of the guys, like, I mean, I hope that it's like, at least in the back of your mind. Not like something you're completely blind about." At the same time, she expressed frustration. "I guess if it's not worth for them to mention? So…it's not even like a problem for them, that's like some of the privileges that they don't see."

Red and Thea were both critical of the gender dynamics in the workplace; in Red's words, "at work I always question the male and female intern work dynamic," but "some people don't want to talk about it." In our focus group, Red explained these dynamics in further detail:

> In the beginning of the program, we did talk about social justice issues, and um, we did – luckily I was invited to like a sex and gender training 101, and I think because of that, ever since that I've really started questioning my work here at the Center. […] What the program lacks sometimes is the conversation of gender relationships and dynamics in how we work together. […] When we facilitate, co-facilitate with people, or pre-plan things as a group, who talks more, who tends to talk more, which gender tends to talk more in the meeting rooms. So…that's my criticism of our program. (Focus group)

Red acknowledges the contribution that APIC made to her own understanding of these dynamics through a training she attended on sex and gender. It is through this understanding that she is able to identify the dynamics that she encounters through her work as a long-time intern at APIC. Indeed, her work is impacted by what she describes as "gender relationships and dynamics," as a young woman working with many young men. Though many of the interns are expected to work together to facilitate their youth programs, the internship and possibly the division lacks the space to discuss how gender dynamics play out in their facilitation and communication styles, as

well as how they interact when they are in a larger group. Red implies that male interns tend to talk more in meetings and in planning, perhaps leading to them dominating the intern spaces.

In our interview, Thea pointed out, "All of the teachers that they have running the student groups are all male." Thea is referring to the facilitators for the high school programs, who are all interns. It is up to the intern facilitators to work with individual schools, collaborate with teachers and clubs at these schools, and put together activities and lesson plans to work on a project. Each school has a different project. When I accompanied Brandon to his program, I was impressed with how much responsibility he held as an intern. However, Thea suggests that the male interns are more often entrusted to do this work, whereas the female interns are more often working with staff and collaborating on different projects. To Thea, it also seemed like "[An upper-level staff person] kind of favors a lot of the guys more," which is demonstrated in the work assignments they receive. These dynamics constantly impact how the female interns feel at work and do their job. "Especially the women interns, we talk about all of those things a lot. And I think some of the reasons we don't go to the office - since it's so male dominated all the time." The work environment is not comfortable for the female interns, affecting their ability to engage in the organization and their internship.

For Thea and Red, feminism was an integral element of their own vision for social justice. In contrast, based on their experience, APIC was not working towards gender justice or equity, despite espousing social justice values. For instance, in our focus group, Thea commented:

> But it's kind of like, if we're advocating for social justice, it's not a very holistic social justice. Um, I don't think. Even when it comes to like, even when it comes

> to like, I'll be frank, sex stuff. Like honestly I think it has to be a sex positive[36] space.

In Thea's understanding, social justice needs to be a "holistic" social justice, addressing multiple dimensions of oppression including sex and gender. Thea acknowledges that sex can be a tricky subject for a youth organization, stating, "like obviously there's like boundaries, but it's like it's still like taboo" indicating that discussion about relevant issues relating to sex should not be stigmatized. She adds, "it's a very gendered thing also," possibly alluding to different expectations and impacts for men and women in discussing or not discussing sex. For instance, Thea critiqued the program for not bringing important issues related to sex and gender to light in its programming for the community. In the following quote, Thea references a recent all-day event that the organization hosted for students in their youth programs and the students' families.

> Like sex and stuff are social justice issues, but it's not something that we really tackle. And I find it really difficult that even in like the [recent YPE event] stuff, like they're – whatever issue it is, it's not about like sex or gender. And like some people I remember like, there was only one workshop that was like sexual harassment in the community, and I remember some people wanting to leave. Like "What? Sexual harassment- I don't want to be here," like in the workshop. And I had to go like oh, they probably, this workshop is supposed to be named this, why are we talking about sexual – like people in general didn't want to talk about sexual harassment and stuff. So like, and we don't really even talk about sexual harassment in the workplace. So its like, oh we're not supposed to talk

[36] Sex-positivity refers to "a movement that arose from a need for us to accept and value sexuality without guilt, shame, and hurt," and ideally encompasses a critical analysis of gender oppression and intersectional oppression more generally (Fabello, 2014).

> about certain things, but even like personal stuff – like personal experience, then how are we supposed to tackle those issues in like a social justice way and stuff.

Thea highlights sexual harassment as an example of a sex and gender issue that she feels is incredibly important for the community to talk about. However, she finds that these are topics that people are not interested in or are discouraged to talk about amongst local community members and in the workplace. She echoes the historic feminist rallying call of "the personal is political," affirming that her personal experience is directly related to social justice and that these personal experiences need to be brought into the social justice work that they do at the Center.

Thea's articulation of a "holistic social justice" is important. Once again, within this critique lives a new vision, a theory about what social justice should be, and a belief that change and social justice advocacy needs to acknowledge multiple, interlocking oppressions (Collins, 2000a; Crenshaw, 1991; hooks, 1981). It is a critique of an identity politics in which the interns and the organization are comfortable discussing race and immigration, but not gender. In challenging APIC to be more sex positive, in relating gender, sex, and sexuality back to social justice, she is both resisting and theorizing – and theorizing through resistance (Kelley, 2014).

Despite the need for deeper integration of sex and gender issues into their work at APIC, the interns also acknowledge that there exists some room for exploration of these issues as a part of their political and personal development. Red, for instance, acknowledged that APIC provides a space for discussion of topics that she couldn't talk about at home, like sex. Brandon, who throughout my interviews was not as likely to discuss sex or gender issues, spoke up in our focus group to share a positive experience talking about sex from an educational perspective:

> I was talking [with a staff member] about a new YouTube channel that I was really getting into. And I think it was – I forgot – it was Sex Plus. And it was basically, it talks about like the psychology of like different things like the LGBT community, or things about like a scientific version of like – the topic of sex. And

> I'm like, I'm really like interested, and I was talking about it with [staff person], and we had this space and this understanding like, I'm going to just talk about this channel, and how this channel is really cool. And you should just check it out, even though the topics are sort of like, saucy in the sense of talking about sex, it's a free space in the sense of like, we have a shared understanding- we're going to talk about this, and we're not going to go off into this weird crazy thing.

Perhaps because of his strong focus on educating himself on different topics and opening himself up to other perspectives, Brandon was appreciative of the chance to discuss sex from a more scientific or educational point of view, without feeling like it was too personal or a taboo subject.

Red and Thea clearly articulate the silences they experienced at APIC, which also echo the silences they encounter in other social justice spaces as well. Despite having some opportunities to discuss sex and gender issues more generally, they find that discussion of their own experiences in the space are dismissed or ignored. I will elaborate on this further into the section. Historically, the intersections of gender, race, and sexuality have been consistently dismissed in feminist and racial justice movements, whether it be gender and sexuality differences and experiences of sexism within organizations and collectives within racial justice movements, or gendered experiences of racism within feminist movements (Collins, 2000a; Crenshaw, 1991; hooks, 1981). Thus, Red and Thea's call for a more holistic social justice that attends to gender oppression resounds with historical resistance against gender oppression in Asian American movements as well.

In her foreward to "Dragon Ladies: Asian American Feminists Breathe Fire," Karin Aguilar-San Juan (1999) describes the limited attention to gender inequality in Asian American activism:

> In order to produce a sense of racial solidarity, Asian American activists framed social injustices in terms of race, veiling other competing social categories, such

> as gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and nationality. The relative absence of gender as a lens for Asian American activism and resistance throughout the 1970s until the present should therefore be read as neither an indication of the absence of gender inequality nor the disengagement of Asian American women from issues of social injustice. (p. x)

The framework of activism and resistance that Aguilar-San Juan describes here illustrate the failure of identity politics to account for intra-group difference in experiences of oppression (Crenshaw, 1991). Further, Aguilar-San Juan draws attention to the "entrenched gender bias that prevails in Asian American politics: the idea that gender is implicated in power relationships only when gender inequality is explicitly prioritized as a problem" (1999, p. ix). In other words, she challenges a prevailing framework and ideology that separates social/racial justice and gender justice, asserting that struggles against power structures (besides cis-heteropatriarchy) also necessarily consist of struggles against gender injustice.

On the contrary though, Thea and Red's experiences at APIC demonstrate the ways in which an Asian American race-based advocacy organization continues to exclude gender. They resist the exclusion of gender issues from their community education and challenge the gendered dynamics that persist within their internship and the YPE division. With regard to an ATR (Agencies of Transformational Resistance) framework, APIC is not able to foster a sustained critique of interlocking and intersecting systems of oppression and has not been able to help all of its agents understand these intersections, thereby not fulfilling the first characteristic of an ATR (2003). Despite the fact that APIC provided opportunities for Thea and Red to further educate themselves on sex and gender issues, these young women found that there were limits to a collective understanding of social justice and limits to the flexibility of the organization in addressing gender inequalities at APIC, as I will discuss in the rest of this section.

Holding a Community Accountable

In their critique of the silence around gender and sexuality, Thea and Red articulated a painful contradiction in advocating for the acknowledgement of gender in spaces that espoused social justice values. Having had their awareness raised by being in these spaces and finding support in these spaces in other ways, both Thea and Red expressed confusion and disbelief at experiencing gender oppression in spaces that were otherwise supportive of addressing social justice issues around race and racism. For instance, Thea shared with me a time when she and others vocalized their experience of gender dynamics at APIC:

> We literally had retreat about it. Where we were literally like crying our – pretty much crying our eyes out cause of like the um, cause some of the gender dynamics that we face- not just like work in specific, because that was about work. But also like outside of work and like why even in the social justice spaces we still face that. And we call ourselves social justice people.

At this intern retreat, Thea and other female interns points out the contradiction between social justice values and gender oppression. "*Even* in the social justice spaces," Thea poses, "we still face that." She challenges the contradiction, indicating that she should not have to experience these types of gender dynamics in social justice spaces. She concludes, "And we call ourselves social justice people," calling out the stark mismatch between values and behavior. Her comments and assumptions reflect her belief, as she shared with the focus group, that APIC needs to have a more holistic idea and embodiment of social justice – one that is inclusive of gender and sexuality.

This sentiment echoed throughout the interviews and observations I conducted. Red's testimony[37] of her experience in separate social justice-oriented group (outside of APIC) illustrates how deeply this contradiction of values impacts her. In the following quote, she describes an art group she was a member of, which had a "social justice instructor." The group finds out that their instructor committed some "acts" of "injustice," which Red later reveals to be a sex and gender-related injustice. The group had a talkback session to gather, react, reflect, and discuss how to move forward:

> Um, everyone in that group was just really confused. And um…especially since this instructor was a social justice instructor. And this person taught – like literally taught – about social justice issues. But what they did was an injustice. So in the group therapy, we just all agreed. We were just really confused about the situation.

In this quote, Red describes how she and other members of the group confront their confusion about how a "social justice instructor" could perpetuate injustice in such a blatant way. However, Red becomes even more critical of the other group members when she realizes they will support their instructor in staying in the group:

> And then…uh one member raised the question, "you know, we have to continue our group. He was our instructor. After everything that he did, would you all be comfortable? Do you feel like we still need this person as an instructor? And raise your hand if you want this person to come back." And a couple people raised their hands, and I was completely shocked. Because the next question was, "raise your hand if you don't want this person to come back." And it was only me and

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[37] I am influenced here by Chicana and Latina feminist scholars who have theorized and utilized the concept of *testimonio* in their research, which "gives voice to one's own experience while also representing the experience of a marginalized collective" (Castillo-Monyota & Torres-Guzmán, 2012, p. 543; see also Pérez Huber, 2012). I do not use *testimonio* as a method, given its roots in Latin American human rights struggles (Pérez Huber, 2012) but I take seriously the responsibility of those who are witness *testimonios* of different kinds to amplify truth to power.

> another person that raised our hands. And I was just very disturbed, because this person did a very injustice act. But these people still wanted this person in the group. So it wasn't just the instructor that kind of gave me a shock, it was also the group members. So this was an injustice act, and it made me question about these people – that raised their hands – the first group that raised their hands. How do they interpret this type of injustice?

Red is disturbed when she realizes the group members plan to give group instructor a second chance, and struggles to understand their decision. What made the group feel like they did not have a choice in instructors? What motivated them give the instructor a second chance? Why do they not take this incident seriously? Red considers the injustice egregious enough to kick the instructor out – but it leads her to question whether the others in the group simply did not consider this injustice that serious. She speculates that perhaps others did not even feel comfortable talking about the issue, since it was a "sex and gender issue." She comments, "the conversations of sex and gender [are] rarely talked about. So maybe I can't blame them for wanting to raise their hand." I am not entirely clear on what Red means here; perhaps the group is not familiar enough with talking and thinking about sex and gender, impacting their perspective on how serious, common, acceptable, or not this issue is? Either way, Red's ending question, "how do they interpret this type of injustice?" evokes her genuine disbelief that her other group members do not think this instance of sex and gender oppression is a problem, or perhaps even a social justice issue.

Red hypothesizes that she and the one other person who did not support the instructor in coming back to the group responded to the injustice the way they did because they connected the instructors' actions to "overall oppression." She contrasts this perspective with the individuals in the group, who treated the situation as an individual problem that had happened already and was no longer an issue.

> Our response was just basically you know, this injustice act, made us question the oppressive system. Like how was this injustice act, that happened a long time ago, has not been questioned before. His actions over the years are very questionable. Very inappropriate. Why was he never approached? All these years ago. Like for all these years. Me and another person were looking at it as a larger scale. […] The overall oppressive act when it comes to um, you know, sexism, and power over another. Taking advantage of the disprivilege. Whereas the other group, they were just not questioning that. They were saying, oh, what the other person did was wrong, but you know what, it just happened, and I'm just going to move on from it, and that's it. So it was like, more about them. Which is like, they have feelings of course. I'm not going to not acknowledge their feelings of course, but for me and the other person, we just felt like we saw this as an example of the oppressive state that we're in, not having conversations about sex and gender.

In her response, Red draws a link between speaking out against her instructor's actions and her conscious critique of a larger oppressive system – connecting this individual act to systemic oppression and power. At the same time, she also draws a connection between this instructors' actions throughout the years – piece by piece, to realize that the problem they found out about was a pattern of behavior by the instructor. In fact, Red's gut intuition had already given her such a bad sense about the instructor that she had asked her friends if they felt similarly about this instructors' behavior. While the other members view it as a behavior independent from other actions and view it as an individual problem, Red realizes that this obscures a larger conversation about gender oppression and plays into the "oppressive state" of silence.

Red goes on to describe the impact this experience and the realization of these contradictions had on her perspective of social change:

> Like before, when I was young, I always had hopes about the world, that there would be changes for the good. But this first group of people that raised their hand, they kind of crumbled my hope, because of their ignorance--but then again

> it's me saying they're ignorant. So maybe I'm being ignorant. I don't know. So it's debatable. I'm just- for me, I just saw them as being ignorant for not seeing that it's problematic to invite this person back in. Because if you invite this person back in, you're supporting this injustice act that this person did.

Red tells me they never invited the person back. However, through this narrative, she underlines the impact of individuals in creating change in a community. Red's poignant disappointment in her community comes from her hope that others in her community shared her vision of gender justice. In Red's words, "It's such like a contradictory…and um, why was this not questioned?! Why is, I don't know, this person has a presence. I don't know. Like why isn't it talked about?? Why wasn't it stopped? Why wasn't it prevented? It's just really hard." Even in our interview, Red still struggles to understand her group's response, and how an instructor could get away with something for so long without someone stepping in. To a certain extent, she holds herself and other group members accountable for not questioning problematic behaviors more, for not stepping in sooner, for not speaking up more. She finds contradiction in not just the unjust act of the individual instructor, but also in the whole community and what she perceives as their complicity with the instructor's actions.

Like Thea, Red identifies a disconnect between racial justice and gender justice, specifically among men of color, and advocates for a broader understanding of social justice. In the following quote, she references a "global perspective" and "global awareness" from Ginwright and Cammarota's (2002) critical consciousness model, which was a model I solicited feedback on from my participants to close out my second interview. Global awareness refers to the practice of "critical reflection in order to empathize with the struggles of oppressed people throughout the world" (2002, p. 90). As demonstrated in the quote, Red concludes from her

experience that men of color have the capacity to empathize with people throughout the world in along the lines of racial injustice, but lack empathy for and analysis of sex and gender issues.

> I feel like I've met people along the way who don't look at things in a global perspective, actually. Like social justice people, they don't look at it as a global thing. Which I find very problematic. […] Just going back to men, I feel like they don't think about sex and gender as an issue. When it comes to men of color, they just focus on how oppression is affecting them as a person of color. And actually, I can see them being an advocate for racial justice, in a global awareness kind of thing. And I've actually seen it. It just depends on the issue. But I just feel like there has been a lack of that from men, when it comes to the issue of sex and gender.

In this reflection, Red hones in on the ways that men of color disregard sex and gender issues, despite having an analysis of oppression and motivation to advocate for racial justice, and being "social justice people." She implies a need for a global perspective that advocates for racial justice alongside with other forms of justice, in order to address sex and gender issues and other issues. Again, she stresses the contradiction or hypocrisy of social justice people who focus on only one issue, or only the issues that affect them.[38]

Now at APIC, Red is determined to not be complicit to further gender injustice in social justice spaces. She directly connects her experience in the social justice arts group to her attempts to address gender dynamics at APIC.

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[38] Despite the attention to this contradiction, only occasionally did I hear any of the interns discuss advocating around issues that did not directly affect them or someone they were close to. Red discussed immigration issues a few times, Brandon touched on multiple hot button political issues, and Thea discussed learning about preferred/proper gender pronouns in undocumented spaces, but these did not necessarily seem to form the basis of their resistance or activism. Additionally, there was limited discussion of age and the ways in which dominant structures privilege adults, which could have been a shared experience across the interns.

> At the same time, when that [the incident in her arts group] happened, we were also questioning…we also see that in other male interns. So we're also just, we have this chance now. We can prevent it. And then we actually address the problem. But it was still – it's still not resolved till now. Why is it so hard? *Why is this issue so hard?*

Red is able to see a larger pattern of gendered behavior and interactions, while also searching for moments to interrupt that pattern. This resistance – as described first in her individual act of speaking out in her arts group, and now in attempting to proactively address manifestations of gender oppression at work – pushes back against the silence she has experienced, and the individuals and structures that make it possible for gender, sex, and sexuality oppression to go unacknowledged and unaddressed at a social justice organization, despite a commitment to social justice. Red pushes for accountability from both perpetrators and bystanders, an understanding of accountability that resonates strongly with anti-violence movements' concepts of community accountability.[39] In insisting on community accountability, she resists dominant structures and cultures that portray incidents of sexual violence and gender inequality more broadly as individual problems, rather than symptoms of a larger patriarchal system. However, her and the other female interns learn through these efforts that resistance is met with pushback; dominant structures and cultures do not budge easily, even in a progressive organization.

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[39] The concept of community accountability comes out of anti-violence and transformational justice organizing against sexual violence, particularly in activist communities. Briefly, it refers to a response to sexual violence that is based in a critique of survivor responsibility, state violence, and incarceration as a response to sexual violence, instead opting for a community response that offers options to support both the survivor and the perpetrator in holding the perpetrator accountable. For instance, see an anthology entitled The Revolution Starts at Home: Confronting Intimate Violence Within Activist Communities (Chen, Dulani, & Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2011). This was a resource I shared with Red after second interview, hoping it would aid her in processing the contradictions of sexual violence in social justice spaces and perhaps offer other visions of possible responses.

Organizing & Pushback

Red and Thea described ongoing efforts at APIC to lift up the experience of female interns and advocate for more attention to gender dynamics. Despite these efforts, however, they have experienced significant pushback and barriers in addressing their concerns. Red and Thea describe their experiences trying to advocate to one APIC senior staff member in particular. However, it may be useful to view their efforts as reflective of the difficulty moving a gender critique within an organization as former constituents of the organization and current interns (which I will also touch on in my last finding section). I did not interview any staff, as my purpose was not to understand the staff perspective but rather to highlight youth perspectives. It is unclear to me how much power particular staff members have to address this issue. Regardless, much of the interns' frustrations deal with how those in power (or who the interns perceive to be in power) do not take the issue seriously.

The issue has become so noticeable and pervasive to the female interns that they have started meeting up to discuss their concerns. Thea explained, "Like two of the other female interns kind of pointed out the problem, and sent out an email, and got together, and like basically just kind of talked about the kind of gender dynamics. But um, it's still going on." Red was more forthcoming: "I'm actually like hosting secret meetings here [laughs] so we can like – how we can figure out how to address this." In effect, they have started to organize to address these issues. Through these meetings, Red and her fellow female interns carve out a supportive and validating space for young women in a male-dominated environment, to identify shared experiences and foster a gender-aware critique and consciousness based on their collective experiences. They have attempted to bring these issues to the attention of management and have talked about the issue with their supervisors, but as Thea noted, the problem persists.

In addition to organizing about gender and sexuality in their workplace, Red and Thea also advocate to incorporate a gender analysis into APIC's high school programs. Reflecting on their own experiences, they deeply feel the value of introducing high school girls to gender oppression as a larger system. For instance, Thea attributed a positive shift in her self-perception and self-worth to education on gender and oppression. In the following quote, Thea reflects on the negative effect a relationship had on her before she was exposed to a gender analysis.

> Especially when you're developing in your adolescent days. You should be able to name those oppressions and like those people and those things that like play, and like I wasn't able to do that. And I think not naming things kind of contributes to a lot of the frustration I had, and a lot like – cause a lot of the negativity that was built up, instead of like channeling that at the oppressor, like at the thing at play, it was like more sort of internalized, and like that's where a lot of insecurities happened for me, and a lot of like self-hate and not feeling worthy happened. It was all redirected at me, and it was all sort of like internalized oppression really.

For Thea, learning to identify larger patterns and systems of oppression along the lines of gender helped her to refocus her perception of this relationship away from self-blame and "self-hate." Thea's testimony echoes Red's comments on the confidence that social justice education and terminology have given her to stand up and challenge injustices. Because of these experiences, Thea and Red hope to pass on the opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of gender oppression: "We work with a lot of high school students, and like I hope they don't go through that. And I hope – I don't know. I feel like there should always be some sort of gender awareness club at schools and stuff." By incorporating these topics into their work at APIC and in the high schools, they see an opportunity to help foster the consciousness that has helped them combat internalized oppression and the silencing of gender oppression in social justice spaces. However, Thea's internship work has not been based in a high school, limiting her directly ability to impact

the high school programs APIC runs. In section 3, I will expand on Red's efforts to incorporate more social justice education in her work with APIC.

Red and Thea thus have been resisting on dual fronts: changing the culture within YPE and their internship program, and advocating for more education on gender, sex, and sexuality in high schools. However, Thea shared with me some of the challenges interns encountered in advocating around gender issues at work.

> It almost I think like backlashed on them [the interns who brought gender to the attention of staff], instead of being like…so yeah, I feel like now there is kind of a negative um, kind of, every time a female intern complains about um something, then it comes off as something like, "oh there they go again."

In particular, they find that they experience pushback from a senior staff person who directs the division. It is unclear if the pushback is to addressing gender dynamics specifically or if there are other factors at play that have made the staff person unreceptive to the interns' requests. Regardless, the young women identify the ways in which this staff person adds to the barriers they experience in addressing gender inequality at work. With nuance, Thea remarks, "I mention her a lot, not just because like, not – not like that its her fault necessarily, but it's like she has the power to kind of like change stuff." Additionally, Thea recognizes that it is not wholly an issue with an individual staff person or even individual interns, commenting, "But it's not just her, it's like obviously the male privilege," presumably referring to the ways in which young men on a whole exert male privilege in the space.

Red, Thea, and the other female interns' critiques have yet to be addressed in a way that feels satisfactory to them. Their efforts to change the work environment have included calling out the intern cohort, sharing their personal narratives around gender oppression in retreats, organizing a group to address the issue, and advocating for high school programs that

incorporate gender analysis. Even more so than race, ethnicity, and immigration issues (in an organization that has largely focused on these issues), gender and sexuality stood out to me as topics that really galvanized my female participants into action. While they are able to recognize the larger systems at play and gain confidence in doing so though, I also found that naming ideology could sometimes make addressing experiences of oppression feel even more difficult and overwhelming.

Impacts of Ideology

Red has always had big dreams for social change. In our Activist Map activity, she told me she knew early on that she wanted to make a difference in the world. Hearing this, I took particular notice when she first mentioned feeling frustrated and defeated. In an earlier quote, Red stated her "hopes" had been "crumbled," after realizing that others would stand by and let past injustices go unaddressed. Further, Red hypothesizes that their lack of concern or willingness to brush the incident off is related to gender – that because there is so little attention to or taboo around gender, sex and sexuality, most people do not see it as an important issue.

At the same time, Red now sees gendered interactions throughout her life and social justice work – a constant feed of problematic dynamics. Red shared with me:

> I mean, I have to admit, sometimes I get so overwhelmed. I learn about immigrant justice issues, and I can already see, oh there's a male and female dynamic in this situation. It's not just one sided. It's you know, oh gosh, there's so many factors right now.

Red describes feeling "overwhelmed," in part by the ubiquity of "gender dynamics." The presence of these problematic gender dynamics also implies the failure of these spaces to adequately address gender. Red does not elaborate on the gender dynamics that she feels

overwhelmed by in immigration justice issues, but she could be referring to both/either the gendered impact of immigration issues as well as the gender dynamic in spaces that are working on immigration justice issues. For instance, Thea spoke of the dynamic she encounters in undocumented immigrant youth organizing spaces, in which men tend to dominate conversations. She comments in particular that originally she thought there would be a difference in gender dynamics with gay/bisexual and queer men, since there are many queer youth leaders in the immigrant youth movements, but ultimately she realizes gender still plays a big part in their group dynamics. In this sense, both Thea and Red found themselves at times overwhelmed by the constant gender dynamics they were experiencing, to the point where Thea wanted to "take a break" from social justice spaces. I will expand on this in the next section.

Red identifies feeling overwhelmed in challenging pervasive and stubborn dominant ideologies. For instance, Red articulates a sense of frustration in not being able to effectively challenge men to confront their masculinity.

> I feel like there's always something that preventing them [men] to like share their feelings, and I feel like it's coming from cultural oppression, that like men should be men. They can't show feelings like a woman. And I just – sometimes I just feel defeated by that, that ideology. Sometimes. But it doesn't mean – yeah, sometimes I feel defeated by that. I'm still trying to work on that. [Pause] I don't know. I'm still trying to understand.

Red points to cultural norms that create a work environment that poses barriers to men in participating in the same ways that women do, and perhaps prevents them from participating in changing these gender dynamics. She is not denying an intrinsic ability of men to recognize or vocalize their feelings, but rather the cultural barriers that serve to silence and degrade this expression of feelings. Red's statement of feeling "defeated" by "ideology" conveys the heavy impact and burden of advocating against gender oppression.

As a youth organizer and educator with an investment in political education, the idea of feeling "defeated" by "ideology" caught my attention as rather poignant and unsettling. This was not a "self-defeating" resistance (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001), but something else entirely. Despite attempting to affect change that was motivated by social justice and incorporated an intersectional critique of power, Red and Thea legitimate feelings of "defeat" negatively impacts their hope for the power of resistance.[40] Their experience complicates an understanding of transformational resistance; indeed, there are no guarantees for transformation, nor can we romanticize social justice. Even while I wish that political consciousness and resistance could be a source of empowerment, I deeply recognize these feelings of disillusionment from my own experiences and others who I have organized with.

It was clear that Red and Thea had benefitted a lot from the social justice education they received, citing more confidence and less internalization of oppression and self-blame. Brandon, too, appreciated open and intellectual discussion of "taboo" topics like sex and sexuality, though he had far fewer critiques and concerns related to gender.[41] As Red and Thea's awareness of sexuality and gender oppression increased though, they also started to locate contradictions in proclaimed social justice spaces and programs. These spaces, they discovered, were still male-dominated, lacked gender awareness, and were unreceptive to proactive and reactionary actions to address problematic gender dynamics. As is often the case, the silences on gender and sexuality in these spaces speak loudly to Red and Thea. Like the Asian American feminists who

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[40] However, Solórzano and Delgado Bernal (2001) describe Yosso's (2000) resilient resistance as the intersection between conformist and transformational resistance where the strategies students use "leave the structures of domination intact, yet help the students survive and/or succeed" (2000, p. 181). In other words, resilient resistance recognizes the necessity of survival as a strategy but it is also not a theory of change.

[41] Brandon's open and eager approach to gender and sexuality still seemed to reflect gender norms, as he tended towards intellectual discussion as opposed to exploring personal experiences.

challenged the identity politics of racial justice and women's rights movements, Red and Thea countered with calls for organizations and peers to address multiple oppressions.

Red's reflections on the impact of resisting manifestations of ideology point in particular to an understanding of resistance as flagging sites of pain, confusion, and desire (Fine, 2014; Kelley, 2014). These sites reveal the moments in which dominant structures collide with our humanity, alerting us to those in pain, and where we collide with dominant structures, uncovering further barriers that exist. Red and Thea's pain points caused by silences on gender and sexuality teach us more about the mechanisms of heteropatriarchy in a progressive non-profit organization that emerged out of the Asian American movement. In sharing their frustration and confusion with me, they also help to direct my gaze towards a need for space to discuss social issues and ideologies that affect themselves and their communities. As Greg Dimitriadis writes, "Young people often develop complicated and contradictory ideas about such issues – and have no place to explore them" (2014, p. 40). Perhaps the meetings the female interns organized helped to meet some of these needs (and also speaks to the need for such a space). Still, making sense of complex contradictions in social justice spaces is a tough and painful process.

Although they hit barriers and encountered pushback to their resistance, both Thea and Red were consistently bringing gender to the forefront and speaking into the silences. They continue to seek accountability from "social justice spaces" like APIC, towards a vision of holistic, gender and sexuality-inclusive social justice.

SECTION 3. Entering the Workplace: Uncovering Non-Profit Contradictions

On my first day of data collection, I sat with some interns for an informal interview. I had just invited them to participate in my study after a volunteer session at APIC. To my surprise, Red invited me to join her and other interns to hang out and chat, teasing me, "you can use it for your research!" It turned out to be a great introduction to their internship experiences at APIC.

> Red and another intern, Yvonne,[42] tell me about a program they used to help out with as interns: We used to work together but then they separated us…probably because we were advocating for the parents, they speculate. "The parents…from the program?" I ask, for clarification.
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> The parents were feeling really left out, Red tells me. We had this program and there were students and parents and the parents felt like all of the activities were geared towards the students. We had to advocate for the parents. "Yeah," Yvonne adds, "I feel like without us, there wouldn't be this much progress." (Field Notes)

In my field notes, I wrote about feeling struck by the tone and wording of their comments – the sense of ownership and responsibility they hold over the programs, mixed with a hint of frustration. What could it be? I wondered. Is it their role as interns? The discontinuation of multiple programs that they mentioned? The trickiness of working with both youth and monolingual parents? The oversights they noted? Yvonne's comment stuck with me.

As I conducted my interviews and my observations, I became increasingly intrigued by the workplace contradictions Red, Thea, and Brandon pointed out. My intent was never to focus specifically on their internship experience at APIC; originally, I planned to explore their perspectives on Asian American political consciousness and the role of youth programs in

[42] I would have loved to highlight Yvonne's story as well, but she was not eligible for my study as she did not identify as Asian American.

getting them to this point. Perhaps this was not surprising – after all, their work as interns makes up a significant portion of their current involvement in social justice spaces. They all shared a common experience through APIC, albeit with different perspectives and critiques on the internship and workplace.

It is my perspective that internal-facing critiques like these often represent both a job well done by social justice spaces as well as room for improvement. This is indeed part of what such programs are aiming for: young people who have developed their critical thinking skills to the point where they can be critical of the ways the spaces they encounter and engage in are reproducing injustice and oppression. As a youth worker and organizer, I am well aware that these dynamics exist in any program. Thus this section (as well as the former section) are not intended to "expose" APIC necessarily, but rather to demonstrate the ways in which young people identify, critique, and respond to the contradictions in social justice spaces/workplaces. I start this section by considering three distinct, but connected, critiques and observations that Red, Brandon, and Thea share with me of their internship experience, which I relate to a systemic analysis of the non-profit industrial complex. To conclude, I describe the forms of reactions and resistance my participants took (or are considering) within the constraints of their internship program.

Professionalism and Authenticity

As interns, Red, Brandon, and Thea are learning both how to work in a "professional" setting and also how to facilitate programs and discussions, while also transitioning out of a participant and member role. For instance, Brandon shared in one of their facilitation skills trainings I observed that he was having some difficulty transitioning roles. "I'm not really a

facilitator yet," he admitted, "I still feel more of a participant, like right now." At times, this transition period seemed to create a tension between the youth leadership aspects of the internship and the expectations of "professionalism." During our focus group, Red shares an experience in which she tried to express her feelings about a situation at work to a staff member in management, and she was told, "I don't think you should tell me, maybe you should go talk to a counselor." Aside from setting specific expectations of professional boundaries, this also served to reinforce to Red the gendered dimensions of professionalism, in which emotions are not allowed and seen as something to occur outside of work. (When Red described this incident, she prefaced it with an explanation of how gender differences affect how interns interact at work.) These boundaries of professionalism seem to change Red's relationship to the organization, revealing the gendered constraints of office culture and a shift in Red's ability to be authentic at APIC.

Red's uneasy experience with the expectations of professionalism are further muddled by the ways in which their internship experience is presented as a youth development opportunity. With a hint of bitterness, Red explains, "I'm so confused because every time we're like in a space with a lot of people, with a lot of interns, they sell us this idea of we're family." For Red, the idea of "family" is intended to create a sense of openness and intimacy. The intern cohort should have space to be vulnerable and authentic with each other, she believes. Yet she is reproved by a staff member for trying to share her reaction to an incident. These conflicting messages result in many different interpretations of acceptability, which she finds questionable and misleading.

Brandon, too, expressed a desire to be more authentic at work and find different ways of connecting with people. In our interviews, Brandon shared with me that lately, he has been trying

introduce a greater range of views and interests, including his more conservative ones. For Brandon though, it is his passion for firearms and firearms history that he feels is not welcome in the space. I personally have little interest in firearms, but even so it was clear to me that Brandon loved to talk about and share his knowledge for firearms and his hobby, airsoft.[43] "I don't know if [my colleagues] will be into it," he confesses. However, his friend told him, "if you don't feel comfortable talking about it in your workplace, then your workplace is not willing to be in it for like free speech and stuff like that." This led Brandon to reflect on how he engages in the workplace. He explains:

> And so I really thought about it, and I was like, you know you're kind of right! Because like if I'm not comfortable to express my ideas then it's not a space, a free space. So I've kind of started to be like, not really gung ho about it, but sometimes drop a little knowledge.

Brandon and his friend evoke free speech and freedom in the APIC space to discuss topics that Brandon perceives as unwelcomed in social justice spaces. Brandon draws a connection between APIC's work and values and valuing free speech to validate his position.

In Brandon's own way, he is finding his voice speaking out at APIC too, however centrist or moderate his interests may be in comparison to others'. Brandon's vision of social justice means creating room for hearing all sides of an issue. "I have to be comfortable in a spot too," he affirms. "I have to be comfortable with my own beliefs, even if it is really in the middle. I kind of value some things and I also value the other side." Considering and seeing multiple perspectives is core to Brandon's philosophy – in fact, throughout our interviews, Brandon critiqued social justice-oriented individuals who were overly critical and enforced extreme

[43] Brandon explained to me that airsoft is a team sport similar to paintball but differs in it's more realistic firearm construction, smaller pellets, and reliance on an honor code to admit being hit with a pellet.

perspectives. Specifically, he described himself as "not a social justice hero," meaning he objects to taking a social justice-based perspective on all topics and enforcing that perspective on others.[44] In speaking about his participation in Brighter Futures, Brandon says:

> And I really, really met a lot of cool people and I kind of start to understand different stereotypes and stuff like that. You know, of course I'm not like a social justice *nut* or hero. I'm not trying to like say everything is racist, or all stereotypes are bad. I just started learning and I started having an open mind and I think that was the important part of [Brighter Futures]."

When Brandon comments that he "started learning and […] started having an open mind," he stresses his willingness to learn and listen and consider another perspective. Brandon indicates that the exposure to multiple ideas and perspective was a key part of his growth and educational experience in APIC's high school program, Brighter Futures. As an intern, he hopes to help recreate that experience for the students currently involved in the Brighter Futures program at his former high school.

At APIC, he also attempts to champion an environment that is open to different ideas and respects freedom of speech. For instance, in choosing a quote from his interview to share and discuss with Red, Thea, and me, Brandon decided to share his quote about freedom of speech. He also provided some further reflections on his decision to bring more of himself into the workspace, acknowledging, "That was kind of a worry for a long time: is like, is this appropriate

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[44] Brandon's description of the "social justice hero" also seems similar to a term that I have seen recently on tumblr (a social media platform), "social justice warrior." Used pejoratively, it is a "term for an individual who repeatedly and vehemently engages in arguments on social justice on the Internet, often in a shallow or not well-thought-out way, for the purpose of raising their own personal reputation. A social justice warrior, or SJW, does not necessarily strongly believe all that they say, or even care about the groups they are fighting on behalf of. They typically repeat points from whoever is the most popular blogger or commenter of the moment, hoping that they will "get SJ points" and become popular in return. They are very sure to adopt stances that are "correct" in their social circle." ("Social Justice Warrior," 2011)

to bring up some of these topics?" He comes to the conclusion that it is important to him, and calls out a contradiction in APIC's values, asserting, "But bottom line is that I don't really want to feel like I'm censoring myself in a space like this – in a space that tries to tout free speech and stuff like that. I don't want to feel like I'm censoring myself." Whether for the sake of professionalism, or a perceived social justice agenda, Brandon ends up feeling like he needs to watch his words – to censor himself. At the same time, it also became clear that Brandon was searching for a space to connect with others. Brandon reflects,

> I only talk about it in passing, at least these days, because back then I was kind of…because sometimes I don't know what to bring up at work, in terms of just like small talk, and I don't know. Everyone's having their conversations, and I want to be part of a conversation. But everybody seems to be like kind of on their own thing. Okay I'll just go somewhere else then… [laughs]

As Thea observed, Brandon's experience at work sounds alienating at times. Thus he seeks space to freely express his own opinions and to share passions of his, whether or not they necessarily match up with the social justice agenda of APIC and what is considered acceptable by their standards. Brandon's critiques, though based in more centrist ideology, demonstrate the ways in which resistance can be read in everyday comments that challenge structures and the status quo, albeit with a more conservative agenda.

Using an alternate frame of reference, Thea also weighed in on the social justice and professionalism conversation. She saw non-profit professionalism as a contrast to the proclaimed social justice values of APIC.

> I think it's always like a battle between like – like yeah we do advocate for like social justice stuff, and things like that. But then here you have to abide by a professionalism. And it's a professionalism that's based on like white society or something…we don't come in in suits or anything like that, but it's always like, there's a code of conduct and things like that…it always seems like we can't cross

> the line on certain things. But it's kind of like, if we're advocating for social justice, it's not a very holistic social justice.

Thea critiques APIC's enforcement of a professionalism that is not necessarily in line with her vision of social justice – for Thea, a vision of social justice requires a challenging of dominant white societal norms. At this point, she goes on to point out the need for more discussion of sex and sexuality in the community they work with, which I detailed in Section 2. Her comment overall though, is a direct critique of the standards of professionalism expected at APIC that are counter to a broad vision of social justice.

In Brandon and Thea's comments, the professionalization of APIC's work seems to cast limits on Brandon's conservative comments about firearms and airsoft but also Thea's discussion of sex and sexuality. Additionally, the interns find themselves governed by a vision of workplace acceptability and professionalism, restricting their authenticity and even likely obscuring a more central vision and mission of the organization and its core culture. Brandon evokes freedom of speech, while Thea critiques workplace standards based in whiteness. As interns navigating this new terrain of professionalism, they shed insight on these surface tensions that fade into blurred memory upon further assimilation into non-profit professionalism.

Dylan Rodriguez (2007) places this manifestation of professionalism within the much larger amalgamation of the non-profit industrial complex: encompassing the non-profitization and professionalization of social movements, the reproduction of consent to state repression, and the restriction of politically radical possibilities. The professionalization of potential activists and revolutionaries into the non-profit version of social movements serves to retain necessary

elements like "social justice" and "freedom"[45] but assimilates them to an appropriate and approved non-revolutionary/reformist framework of operating which ends up reproducing the "fundamental structures and principles of a white supremacist U.S. civil society" (2007, p. 39). In relation to Red, Thea, and Brandon's internship at APIC, such opportunities are necessarily and by design a product of professionalization and a conduit for learning appropriate workplace skills and conduct, but with little questioning of the dominant structures on which "non-profit" and "professionalism" is based on. Thus it is notable that within my conversations with the interns, there exist currents of critique and resistance of these structures and the restrictions of appropriateness imposed on them as interns.

"They're Just Interns": Limits to Opportunity

Chatting with Red and Yvonne on my first day of data collection, I realized that both of them had devoted a lot of time to APIC as interns. Both had been interning at APIC since 2012, and Red had been a youth in their high school programs even before then. Their longstanding participation is a testament to the lasting impact of APIC's high school programs and a successful leadership pipeline that brings in interns who intimately know the programs and are dedicated to the organization, which is a huge gift. It is also a fantastic opportunity for interns to have an organization like APIC where they have the chance to grow and develop their skills (particularly while being paid). For instance, Red commented, "Yeah, in the beginning the program helped me a lot. And taught me a lot like what it is to be a facilitator, I'm still learning,

[45] Freedom too, has been heavily co-opted from the 60's and 70's, such that agents of neoliberalism can claim freedom as freedom of the market as opposed to freedom of the people (Harvey, 2005).

I'm still want to improve on that." Red's commitment to growing and learning may also be part of what kept her in the internship and at APIC for so long.

Consequently, Red's tenure at APIC has also given her a more critical perspective on her role in the organization. She disagrees with the way interns treated by others at APIC, and feels she and others have been given false promises. For instance, in the following exchange, Brandon, Thea, and Red discuss the possibility that they might get promoted to a "fellow" role.

Thea: I also heard from [upper manager] herself that they're trying to like up our sort of roles? Like from – like what Dawn said – from intern to fellow, and then like that comes with certain privileges. And then like *maybe* uh like giving us cards that would access this building at any time.

Brandon: Yeah not like the current cards we have-

Thea: Yeah and also like up our pay, which would be really cool. And I think that's like 1) really cool, because I think a lot of us actually do a lot more than just being interns. And it requires a lot more hours and time. And its kind of just like taking us more seriously and stuff…

Red: I don't know. I kind of…I think [laughs a little]- I'm kind of skeptical a little bit. I just don't believe in that system. I just feel like they're giving us this luxurious items just to make us believe that we're gonna eventually become staff members. But nope, we're fellows. And I do still feel unwelcomed in the office, not just by this department, by some people, but also other departments. Like, some smile at me, like I don't know their name, but they smile at me. But others they just shut me out. I just – they give me the vibe of like, "they're just interns." "She's still here? After all of these years?"

Whereas Thea and Brandon seem excited at the prospect of becoming fellows and gaining access to greater privileges at APIC, Red's response is laced with jaded-ness and a desire for

appreciation. Thea also, in her comment, acknowledges that they "do a lot more than just being interns," and indicates that she feels staff do not take the interns seriously. Red alludes to a hope that the internship would eventually lead to a staff position, which she feels she was led to believe. Additionally, she feels unrecognized by staff members in multiple departments. Taken in the context of the conversation between Yvonne and Red earlier, Red is left feeling undervalued despite feeling like her (and other interns') contributions have greatly benefited the organization and its programs. Having put in over three years as an intern, Red is likely reaching a ceiling for her own personal and professional growth and development within the confines of what APIC can provide her or is willing to provide her, which she later acknowledges.

As paid interns at a non-profit organization, Thea, Red, and Brandon are considered lucky. Very rarely can students get paid, long-running internship opportunities at a community-based non-profit. Given the level of responsibility they have in their roles and the comments by Thea and Red, however, it seems that the interns are doing work that could also be a staff position. During my observations, I saw other interns also voicing an interest in becoming part-time staff members, which would represent more legitimacy and trust (like having key card access), and would likely offer higher wages and the option for benefits.

At the same time, this emphasis on employment and moving up the ladder should be questioned. As I described in my theoretical framework and above, critics of the non-profit industrial complex shine a spotlight on the "overly bureaucratic formality and hierarchal (frequently elitist) structuring of the NPIC [which] has institutionalized more than a series of hoops through which aspiring social change activists must jump" (Rodriguez, 2007, p. 27). Reading Red's cynicism through this lens, we can understand her suspicion that they are being given yet another incentive to placate them with no real movement towards a position of

significance A leadership pipeline can then be understood, less romantically, as opportunities formulated to assimilate young people to a particular non-profit structure and politics, or as Rodriguez writes, the granting of opportunities within "a labyrinthine state-proctored bureaucracy" (2007, p. 39). Though Red desires more recognition and responsibility in her work at APIC, she has also started to question and make sense of these inconsistencies in the organization.

Funding Limitations

Another critique that emerged in my interview with Red was the difficulty of working under grants as an intern and the limitations that funding could create for programs. Early on in our interview, Red had described her role in the organization as "basically help[ing] to carry out the requests of grants," though she recognized that "ultimately" the goal is to "please the community." What an interesting way to describe her work, I thought. I wondered how much emphasis the department placed on funding and meeting grant requirements as a part of Red's internship responsibilities. Or perhaps Red holds herself accountable to these requirements? Regardless, Red clearly understood the some of the demands non-profits balance. The juxtaposition of funding versus serving the community demonstrates Red's recognition that meeting grant requirements is important in the immediate, but also that the organization should ultimately be accountable to the community, not funders.

Later in our interviews, Red mentioned grant requirements again, this time explaining why she decided to move on from Starfruit (STR), the program she attended in high school, which she had previously helped facilitate for a couple years as an intern. This year, the program is working on a project about air quality in their community. Red tells me she felt constrained by

the grant parameters: "Actually, with the work I do at STR, I always want to talk about that [sex and gender], but again it's air quality…and there's no time for that apparently." She continues, "Um, unfortunately, due to grant requirements, that's not included in the grant request. It's not written in the grant proposals. So. I don't know. [Pause] Yeah. It's really sad." In the previous section, Red and Thea had expressed a lot of interest in providing space for high school students to discuss sex and gender. Red remarks pensively, "if I could just provide a space to talk about that [sex and gender] for the STR kids, that would be really cool. And how that affects them – how that intersects with their Asian American identity." Unfortunately, Red is unable to do so through STR because they are already committed to working on the air quality project this year. Presumably, Red has been told there is not time in the program to discuss sex and gender, or even get more into race and intersectional identities. Red expresses disappointment in not being able to explore these issues with the STR students, which she recognizes as "very unique" experiences at the intersection of race and gender, leading to her departure from this particular high school program.

Red is passionate about social justice education and giving participants the knowledge and tools to recognize and challenge oppression. For instance, Red told me about trying to draw a connection from air quality to environmental racism by having the students look at demographic data and air quality data. However, Red still feels like she does not get many opportunities to frame air quality as a social justice issue in the curriculum. Red commented:

> I guess that's another reason I wanted to leave "air quality," because it doesn't give me the opportunity to want to – I don't know, give them the motivation with social justice education. Like I want to give them social justice education to

> motivate them to challenge those principles [referring to challenging systems of power and dominant narratives].[46]

During our Activist Map activity, Red attributed much of her development as an activist to opportunities to learn about sex, gender, and feminism, as well as learning about social justice issues and terminology. She is saddened that she is not able to expose high school students to ideas that she found empowering from STR, her internship, and other outside sources, like college. The funding parameters serve to create a contradiction in which Red is not able to use the space she found empowering to pass on additional knowledge to younger students. Red is aware of her own desire to address some of the needs she had as a high schooler, admitting that she may be projecting her former high school self onto the current students. Regardless, in viewing Red as the expert on her own experience, it is clear she has the most insight into her needs and what types of activities might resonate well with the students.

Limitations caused by funding are certainly not uncommon in non-profit organizations. The political restricting of issues and agendas in non-profits due to funding constraints and reliance on philanthropic organizations has been highlighted in Incite!'s 2004 anthology, The Revolution Will Not Be Funded. The restrictive influence and impact of philanthropic organizations on social movements form a core component of this critique of the non-profit industrial complex. Setting outcomes in accordance with grants is a fairly ubiquitous practice in non-profits, so it is not surprising that Red picked up on this easily. However, I was moved by Red's sadness that she was so limited by these grants, and I suspect that Red takes these limitations somewhat personally.

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[46] This quote comes from our discussion of the transformational resistance matrix at the end of our second interview. I had explained that one axis corresponded to a larger critique of systems and power and gave the example of a student challenging school administration, recognizing the administration as a source of power and authority.

While my participants shared with me some of their experiences in and critiques of APIC and social justice spaces (as detailed above), they were less likely to identify a clear course of action aside from discussing some of their concerns individually with their internship supervisors. Many times, it appeared that the contradictions they encountered obstructed their full participation, for Red and Thea in particular. Thus they reacted and resisted accordingly, in the ways they knew how, as I will detail in the rest of this section.

Danger of Burn Out

In contrast to Red, Thea's negotiation of contradictions in the workplace and in social justice spaces more generally, was closely tied to her own internal negotiations between a vision of social justice and practicality. In our second interview, Thea expressed to me that she was not feeling connected to a vision of social justice at the moment. As I discussed in Section 2, Thea pointed out the ways that social justice spaces she engages in are not actually acting on a vision of holistic social justice.

> I feel like right now I'm more…not even motivated by social justice [laughs]. I feel like, cause I am sort of on hiatus, so…in where I've been kind of more questioning social justice spaces [CC: hmmm]. Um, whether you want to be – social justice spaces are like really- you should also be really critical of social justice spaces and how they contribute to social oppression.

Thea's disillusionment with social justice spaces seems to lead her to question if social justice is really a possibility. This becomes a consistent theme in our interview – Thea's recognition of larger systems and ideologies creates tension for her in inhibiting social justice spaces. For instance, Thea commented: "sometimes I feel like I can't live without a certain social oppression. Like…sometimes…I don't know…if I can completely live without capitalism. […] As much as it really, really, really sucks." Thea alludes to an irreconcilability between a seemingly relentless

capitalist system and her own sense of justice. Her comment demonstrates a critique of capitalism as social oppression, but also recognizes her own enmeshment and complicity in the system. In tone, Thea appears resigned and discontent.

To me, Thea's quotes speak to a need for greater and self-critique in social justice spaces in addressing the contradictions that arise for young people as support they are politicized and getting more and more involved in social justice issues – opportunities we make available for young people. At the same time, there is a clear need for proactive visioning. As an intern, Thea becomes immersed in social justice work but risks becoming burned out. For instance, Thea commented: "[Being super critical is] a really hard place to be. I don't even know if I want to be entirely there all the time. Um, because what does deconstructing, or like recreating some like sort of world, or decolonizing even mean?" Thea alludes to the immensity of re-envisioning a world. How can we truly imagine the world as it is without colonization, or without capitalism? Is this possible? These questions raise serious concerns for Thea. She cannot imagine staying in that space of re-envisioning and dismantling. She continues, laughing a little, "It's like…it kills you. I think there's an article called like 'Fired Up and Then Burnt Out.'" Thea brings up the article in our conversation, evoking the consequences of remaining involved in social justice at such a high level. At other times, she sits with these tensions and comments, "I think a critical point to be is like, just being really critical," even if it is not possible to act in accordance with a vision of social justice all the time.[47] This allows her to intentionally negotiate some of these situations, deciding when and how to act if possible.

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[47] This draws on the part of my interview where I introduced the transformational resistance model to the participants. Thea is referring to the y-axis of "Critique of power," as more important and salient to her at the moment, as opposed to the x-axis of "Orientation towards social justice."

During our focus group months later, Thea discloses that she was going through a tough time in this particular interview. "I remember doing this [her second interview] during like the mercury retrograde. It was bad," Thea remarks, laughing. "Yeah 'I want a hiatus.' Yeah, that was it." Her comments demonstrate fluctuations in her participation and perspective on social justice spaces – both a constant negotiation and ambivalence, that brings her in and out of the work. At the same time, Thea also suggests in this conversation that she is interested in working in non-profits (though her parents would prefer something more profitable).

Thea's quotes illuminate a dual challenge of social justice spaces as oppressive spaces and the impossible-seeming task of achieving "deconstruction" and "decolonization" towards a new vision of society. Taken together, it seems near-impossible to make much headway in social justice work and non-profits. Thus, while Thea questions the expectation or possibility of maintaining a certain level of criticality in social justice spaces, she also recognizes the frustrating pattern of oppression that has *not* been "deconstructed" or addressed in these spaces. Given this combination, it may not be surprising that Thea is questioning the social justice spaces she finds herself in and needs to take time away.[48]

Being a Leader

Despite critiques of APIC, Red still recognizes the great personal growth she gained through her participation. Now, she considers whether it is time to move on to continue her personal and professional growth:

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[48] Regardless of whether Thea is active in a social justice space or not, I would not be surprised if she continued to bring a social justice-motivated critique to her interactions in other communities or spaces for herself. I believe, personally, that social justice work does not need to take place in a "social justice space" or at a non-profit, and can be manifested in any number of creative ways.

> I was having this conversation with some people and I just felt like, maybe I've just outgrown this program. I don't know if that's a good thing or a bad thing. In the beginning the program benefitted me a lot. I didn't really understand what a leader was. Yeah you learn about it in elementary school or middle school, but how do you really it put into practice. And then how does that – how do you play that role?

Red's reflections on her growth and learnings in the program and her rhetorical question, "how do you play that role?" double as a question for her future as a leader in the organization and in social justice spaces. Because of the program, Red knows more what it means to be a leader, how to be a "good resource" to a community[49], how to name oppression and inequalities. She also indicates, as I discussed in the previous section, that some of her doubts about the organization stem from her realization that the youth programs and internship program largely ignore sex and gender (and sexuality): "Ever since that [sex and gender 101 training] I've really started questioning my work here at the Center. I just realized there's a lack of conversation about gender." Perhaps Red's leadership was in part catalyzed by this realization, pushing her to speak out more about gender dynamics in the organization – to put her leadership "in practice." To echo Red, it may be unclear if this is "a good thing or a bad thing" - it is likely both.

As a microcosm of society, workplaces replicate systemic patterns of oppression to some extent, in spite of efforts social justice-oriented organizations may make to counteract these patterns. As a youth worker and organizer, it is interesting to me that the workplace became a place of advocacy and activism, as opposed to a facilitator of their advocacy and activism

[49] Red told me early on she had moved on from STR now that they were doing air quality, commenting, "so I just want to focus on other areas, or other communities where I can help - if they need more help - and be a good resource to another community."

elsewhere – in the schools and in the communities APIC worked in. It is clear that the internship also provided them great opportunities to exercise and develop their skills. For instance, all of my participants tribute APIC as a place of personal and professional growth: Brandon through his film project, Red in challenging students to think about issues in relation to power and systems, and Thea in learning how to bridge divisions of language and age in a community.

At the same time, I found my participants raising concerns with their internship and their experience with the organization overall. In addition to ignoring gender dynamics, Red also described feeling unappreciated as an intern and did not see opportunities for advancement beyond an intern position. Thea criticized social justice spaces as contradictory and not self-sustaining in their critiques, whereas Brandon and Thea critiqued the expectations for professionalism and acceptable workplace discussion, alienating them from the organization at times. These contradictions certainly are not unique to APIC – they are reflected in a number of organizations that provide opportunities for youth to get involved in social justice work, and social justice-oriented organizations more broadly.

Given a limited scope of organizational power, my participants are considering their options to resist as well as stay true to their own vision of social justice and authenticity. Thea described wanting to take breaks from social justice spaces, and Red, after shifting responsibilities at APIC away from STR and seeking opportunities to incorporate more social justice education, is deciding if it is time to move on from the organization. Brandon relied on individual opportunities to bring his own more centrist perspectives into discussions with his fellow interns, and even in our focus group. These actions can be viewed as resistance in the same way that high school dropouts and students exhibiting "oppositional behavior" can be understood as advancing a critique of educational inequities, though the structures and actors

themselves are different and should not be compared as similar. However, many of the critiques my participants advanced highlight their position as young workers entering the non-profit industrial complex, making sense of these social justice / non-profit contradictions. Indeed, it is important to note the possible adultist biases the interns encounter because of their position as young people within an adult-dominated hierarchy, although it was not a significant topic of discussion in my interviews.

Both their critiques of the contradictions and reactions to these contradictions point to moments of resistance, as well as moments of alienation. At the same time, they are learning to name some of these contradictions, call them out, and work to hold organizations accountable in the ways they know how.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

This examination of three Asian American youth reflect an understanding of youth resistance as a "fluid and dynamic" concept, something not to be romanticized but respected as "revelatory," pinpointing areas of friction where power is challenged, glitches of reproduction, moments of pain and confusion, and the search for explanation and understanding of dominant structures (Tuck & Yang, 2014a, p. 13; Kelley, 2014, p. 87). This research has facilitated my own understanding of resistance as complex and varied. As I wrote in my methods section, I found myself gravitating towards moments in which participants expressed frustration and alienation – and yet, I found these were also moments of meaning making. In reviewing my findings, I want to highlight three overarching themes that relate to my two research questions:

1. How do Asian American youth involved in social justice-oriented programs resist dominant ideologies and structures?

2. How have social justice-oriented programs facilitated or not facilitated their resistance?

1. Resistance as Theorizing

"All around us, young people are at the forefront of asking how we imagine a different future, but their theorizing goes unnoticed because youth are still seen as the junior partners of the social movement" (Kelley, 2014, p. 88).

Examining the instances of resistance I highlighted, it is also possible to consider many of them as also moments of theorizing, in which my participants take ideas from dominant narratives and tweak, revise, and rearticulate new possibilities. These possibilities do not necessarily accomplish a transformation of society, but perhaps a shift in thinking and a change in conditions (Kelley, 2014). For instance, Thea rejects the label of American and is critical of assimilationist forces, speculating about a new meaning for American-ness and citizenship that is not exclusive or dehumanizing. Brandon adamantly advocates a shift from money and career as designators of success, to focus on his passion and happiness in filmmaking. He attributes this dominant narrative to his family's exemplification of the model minority myth. Red and Thea call for a vision of activism that incorporates an understanding of "global oppression" and "holistic social justice," which stems from but extends beyond their challenge to male dominated social justice spaces. Thus, through their redefining and theorizing new alternatives to dominant ideologies and narratives, my participants manifest resistance to these narratives. At the same time, they also often expressed uncertainty and frustration in making sense of these dominant ideologies and their relation to them, which I summarize in the next theme.

2. Pain and Loss of Hope

In learning to understand the resistance that my participants engaged in, I was struck by the frustration, confusion, and disillusionment Red and Thea expressed in particular. These feelings were a valid and relatable response to the multitude of contradictions they encountered in their individual lives in relation to class, race, and immigration status, in social justice spaces as young women, and in their internship/work space as young leaders entering a professionalized non-profit organization. Even Brandon expressed a sense of alienation in learning to relate to other interns and the work environment. Though they are young people who advance a conscious critique and resistance of dominant structures, they are still subject to the backlash or consequences that materialize. For Red, that may have looked like a loss of hope when she realized most people in her social justice arts group were willing to accommodate inappropriate behaviors. For Thea, it may look like feeling burnt out from social justice spaces and questioning the feasibility of a vision of social justice and/or decolonization. For Brandon, it may look like further alienation from interns at an organization that he credits a lot of positive identity development to. It may look like my participants not meeting their family or parents' expectations.

Resistance scholarship recognizes the fluidity and dialectic of resistance and accommodation. Michelle Fine writes,

> Youth, like the rest of us, speak in marbleized tongues, braiding discursive currents of critique and fear, desire and ambivalence, a yearning to exist and a profound wish to be-long. Resistance is never pure, never simply oppositional or rejecting; it is often enacted with an affective bouillabaisse of anger, disappointment, sense of injustice, desire, yearning, and ambivalence. (2014, p. 50)

Like Kelley's (2014) assertion that "resistance is revelatory," decoding and discussing moments of resistance with my participants uncovered a more ambiguous picture of resistance, one that is

a mix of sense-making and confusion, hope and loss, within the contradictions of everyday interactions with dominant norms, narratives, and ideologies. As Greg Dimitriadis acknowledges, we have to resist the urge to make the research and the narratives neat (2014).

This is something that Thea articulated with both clarity and ambiguity when I discussed the concept of transformational resistance with her. It would be impossible to pinpoint a spot on the matrix, she indicated, as she drew an amorphous cloud across almost half the matrix. "I'm like around here," she commented resolutely.

3. Space to Make Sense

Within the context of my second research question, on the role of social justice-oriented programs in facilitating resistance, I still believe social justice spaces have the potential be of great assistance to move through cycles of resistance and ambivalence and disillusionment. However, it is undoubtedly clear that much intentionality and proactive effort is needed to do so. Based on my participants' comments, APIC seemed to provide an exploratory space for students to connect with social justice issues, cultural identity and political identity with race and immigration status, and to start to learn about larger dominant structures. They were able to manifest through our discussions and in their past experiences a resistance to dominant narratives relevant to Asians/Asian Americans like the model minority myth and the American dream. However, when it came to making sense of male domination and silences on gender, sex, and sexuality in social justice spaces or of feeling constricted within APIC, they had fewer supports in sorting through these contradictions of power, values and visions.

These distinctions of issue area clearly also reflect the support in general at APIC for working on race and ethnicity and the lack of support for other issues, as Thea had pointed out to

her intern cohort and as I wrote about earlier on in this thesis. It also reflects a historical trend of civil rights and social movements that were less willing to look inward and address areas of difference within a movement, as opposed to outward-facing resistance of dominant structures.[50] However, as these tensions persist and echo, it is important to address the needs and feelings that arise from challenging and resisting, and find space to make sense of contradictions.

For my participants, resistance encompasses both the reaction to needing space to work through contradictions and also the questioning of contradictions itself. For instance, Michelle Fine, in her reframing of high school dropouts as an act and result of resistance to educational inequalities, observes, "they know no safe, public sphere in which to analyze, mourn, and make sense out of these contradictions" (Fine, 1991, p. 107). Without this space, resistance in Fine's research took the image of self-defeating resistance. Accordingly, we could imagine that nurturing spaces within communities to explore these contradictions could help social justice-oriented youth programs enact resistance that addresses the range of inequalities, injustices and contradictions.

Recommendations

This study highlights the experiences of three Asian American youth leaders who work as interns at a social justice-oriented youth program that works on race, ethnicity, immigration, and other social justice issues. Since part of this thesis examined a particular youth program and it's successes and challenges in fostering youth resistance, there are certainly tangible implications

[50] Helen Zia has a telling anecdote in her book *Asian American Dreams: The Emergence of an American People,* in which she is confronted by her Asian American and Black organizer peers about her suspected lesbian identity (2001, p. 228).

for practitioners: youth workers engaged in some version of social justice youth development. Some of the scholars I have quoted in this thesis have already critiqued the joining of youth resistance and youth development. This research has certainly shown that youth resistance is not necessarily predictable, and not to be romanticized through youth development frameworks. At the same time, my participants indicated the benefits they perceived from social justice youth development-style programs. For instance, Red indicated she was critical of certain power dynamics before she understood systems of power, but found them difficult to name. She detailed the confidence that learning terminologies gave her. Brandon and Thea spoke about how they had internalized certain ideas relating to ethnicity and gender, respectively, and found that learning about stereotypes and larger systems and patterns of inequality helped them to better understand their experiences and move away from self-hate and self-blame. On the other hand, these understandings can be a double-edged sword. After coming into understanding about systems of oppression and power / dominant structures, they also found themselves experiencing the frustration of the slowness of change in institutions, resistance from others to examining their privilege, and realizing the ways in which others are complicit (and that they are complicit).

My undeniable stake in this project is my interest in exploring ways to keep Asian American youth engaged in social justice and resistance. This is not to be taken for granted – as is clear from my discussions with my participants, alienation from these spaces is a common experience. As I discussed early on in this paper, these are stakes that Asian American activists and scholars have also articulated: a call for Asian Americans to participate in resisting predefined narratives of the model minority and American Dream and in resisting the role of the wedge group in U.S. racial politics. More broadly though, my findings emphasize a need for

opportunities that facilitate resistance and interest in social justice that address race and also extend far beyond just race.

Appropriately, many of the themes that emerged relating to resistance necessitated intersectional lenses and a structural analysis, even though my findings certainly included examples of resistance relating to race and immigration status. This speaks to a need for youth programs to address race, ethnicity, immigration status and history, nationality, class, and definitely gender and sexuality if they seek to support sustainable youth resistance (much like Agencies of Transformational Resistance [Covarrubias & Revilla, 2003] also hold a multidimensional consciousness as a necessary characteristic). Other social locations relating to age, ability, and level of education were also discussed by participants, but not in as much depth. Red and Thea, two female participants, advocated loud and clear for such programs to develop consciousness around gender and sexuality and for male interns to address their male privilege. Unfortunately, the need still remains. This finding suggests a need for more practical implementation of initiatives to address gender dynamics in social justice youth programs and leadership programs, particularly that which incorporates other research to help better understand the organizational factors that create these dynamics within a social justice context. For Red and Thea this has a direct impact on their interest in staying engaged in such spaces.

With regards to race and ethnicity, my participants expressed a familiarity with navigating the model minority myth, particularly in their families. However, they also struggled at times with challenging the model minority myth and more stereotypical measures of success and navigating their family's need for financial security in a capitalist society. Asian American social justice-oriented youth programs could consider fostering spaces to unpack some of the tricky negotiations around narratives like the model minority and immigrant American Dream.

Finally, the layers of critique of the non-profitization of youth resistance and social justice movements and the impacts of attempting to make sense of the contradictions between non-profit structures and social justice values are worth considering. My experience in youth leadership and youth organizing programs leads me to believe that the goal of having more young people moving up the leadership pipeline (for instance, from youth participant to youth leader to intern) goes largely unquestioned. The cohort of interns at APIC that I worked with felt responsible for a great deal of the work and the successes of their programs (and I would agree with their personal assessment). At the same time, participants already seemed to be reaching a ceiling to how far they could go as interns, to their disappointment. Additionally, my interviews and observations indicated that interns were picking up on a number of non-profit contradictions, including a level of normative "professionalism" that they were learning to navigate, the stifling of efforts to embody their authentic selves in the workplace, hierarchy and pushback to efforts to improve gender dynamics, and constraints to the desired programming through funding limitations. As Fine (1991) and Dimitriadis (2014) have written, young people notice these contradictions and complexities and seek to make sense of them; we need space for young people to work through their own ideas about these issues if we are to encourage their entry into non-profits in particular, but any institution more broadly. Simultaneously, within the specific setting of a non-profit organization, organizational culture also needs to shift to allow more room for self-reflection and critique.

Conclusion

In conceptualizing this research, I sought to examine the resistance of Asian American youth and how a non-profit youth program space can facilitate conscious youth resistance. I am

motivated to do so by dual interests based in the assumptions that Asian American youth resistance is a social justice project, and that building support for youth leadership entering into social justice movements is worthwhile and is also a social justice project. After reviewing the findings and the literature, it became clear that neither of these assumptions could be taken for granted or at face value. First, Asian American youth resistance also resists being categorized into a particular identity category of race, or even the term "Asian American." While my first section of findings relates to my participants' redefinition of success and assimilation, in my following sections, I show how their resistance also manifested along the lines of gender and within their non-profit work/intern space. As I wrote in my methods section, I decided to approach the data with an eye to the resistance of Asian American youth as opposed to youth resistance with a focus on Asian American politics. This more clearly reflects the call from my participants for a more holistic social justice, and an underlying analysis of interlocking and intersectional systems of oppression and their challenge to identity politics (Collins, 2000a, 2000b; Crenshaw, 1991). Second, both my findings and the literature challenge an uncritical approach to the role of social justice-oriented youth programs, particularly those housed in non-profits, in supporting youth resistance. These non-profit programs run the risk of colluding in the systemic containment of dissent (Rodriguez, 2007). In my short time at APIC, I observed a mix of resistance against the constraints posed by non-profits in the pursuit of professionalism and funding as well as a desire to be recognized and become part of the non-profit "sector." This mix of resistance and accommodation is a key characteristic of resistance as well. As Thea stated in our focus group, my participants' resistance engages a constant "push and pull," seeking social justice spaces and finding them lacking, and the "give and take" of trying rid oneself of the

"colonized mind" while contending with realities of survival and making sense of dominant narratives about success.

Finally, it was clear that the more engaged my participants were in social justice spaces, the more they also questioned the contradictions of social justice spaces and organizations, resulting in burn out and disengagement. This speaks to a great need for what Michelle Fine describes as the "real work of resistance," to "offer critical alternatives so people can imagine what's possible," "beyond resistance" (2014, p. 56). While my participants have begun to articulate their own visions and theories for our futures, including of success beyond Asian American stereotypes and capitalistic needs, a vision of accountability and holistic social justice, and workplaces that foster authenticity and provide empowering education towards social justice, they desire a sense of achievable justice, support from their community of peers, and room for critique and further visioning. Where this will and can happen remains up to us youth workers, organizers, non-profit workers, healers, cultural workers, youth resistance researchers, and community members for social justice.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Development of Research Questions

Proposal (First Draft):

1. To what extent do Asian American youth exhibit transformational resistance?
    a. If so, what types of critical consciousness are they describing?
2. How do Asian American youth describe internalizing and challenging racial master narratives?
    a. To what extent are Asian American youth thinking critically about the model minority master narrative?
    b. What consciousness-raising experiences contribute to challenging the master narratives?
    c. To what extent are Asian American youth challenging the Asian American community's role as a model minority wedge group?

Data Collection (Second Draft):

1. How do Asian/Asian American youth describe internalizing and challenging the American Dream and related cultural logics?
    a. What consciousness-raising experiences contribute to challenging these cultural logics?
2. To what extent do Asian/Asian American youth exhibit transformational resistance?
    a. How does transformational resistance capture intersectional experiences of resistance and conformity?

b. If so, what types of critical consciousness are they describing?

Data Analysis (Third Draft):

1. How do Asian/Asian American youth involved in social justice-oriented programs describe internalizing and challenging the American Dream and related dominant ideologies?

a. What challenges and supports exist for Asian/Asian American youth in resisting these ideologies?

b. What practices are Asian/Asian American youth employing to resist common sense notions of the American Dream and other dominant ideologies?

c. What are the dominant ideologies and narratives that are emerging?

d. What consciousness-raising experiences contribute to challenging these narratives?

Data Analysis (Fourth Draft):

1. How do Asian/Asian American youth involved in social justice-oriented programs conceptualize and practice their resistance to dominant ideologies and norms?

Writing (Final Draft):

1. How do Asian American youth involved in social justice-oriented programs resist dominant ideologies and structures?
2. How have social justice-oriented programs facilitated or not facilitated their resistance?

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Note: My interviews ranged from unstructured at times to semi-structured. In general, I used these questions as launching pads to explore comments and anecdotes that arose relating to moments that alluded to critique/resistance/rebellion/challenging others or dominant structures, and development of political consciousness.

First Interview

Warm-up Questions:

1. Can you tell me about your role here at APIC?
2. Can you tell me how you came to be involved in APIC?

Activist Map Activity

Materials: Paper, Pencils & Pens, Markers/Colored Pencils
Prompt: Create a map of your journey to becoming an activist. Interpret "map" and "activist" any way you would like (timeline, word maps, drawings, etc.)
Don't put your name on it.
Provide examples if necessary.

Life and Family History:

1. Can you tell me about your life growing up? Can you tell me about your family?
2. What was your experience in high school?
3. When did you / your parents migrate to the U.S.? What led to your parents' decision to come over to the U.S.? How do you think that might have impacted how they raised you?
4. You had mentioned _____ (ethnic or racial identity). To what extent do you identify with a category of Asian?
    a. (Thea) You mentioned in your email that you don't identify with "American" – what does that bring up for you, what does it mean to you?

Second Interview (Modified based on first interview)

Interview Questions

1. (Thea) Would you be willing to elaborate on what came up in the facilitation training when you were talking about gender?
2. (Red) What are some social issues that are important to you?
3. (Red) Mentioned the idea of success...what is your idea of success in the U.S.?
    a. How has your family influenced that idea of success?
4. Have you felt a pressure to assimilate or not assimilate, and from whom?
5. (Brandon) Can you tell me more about social justice heroes?

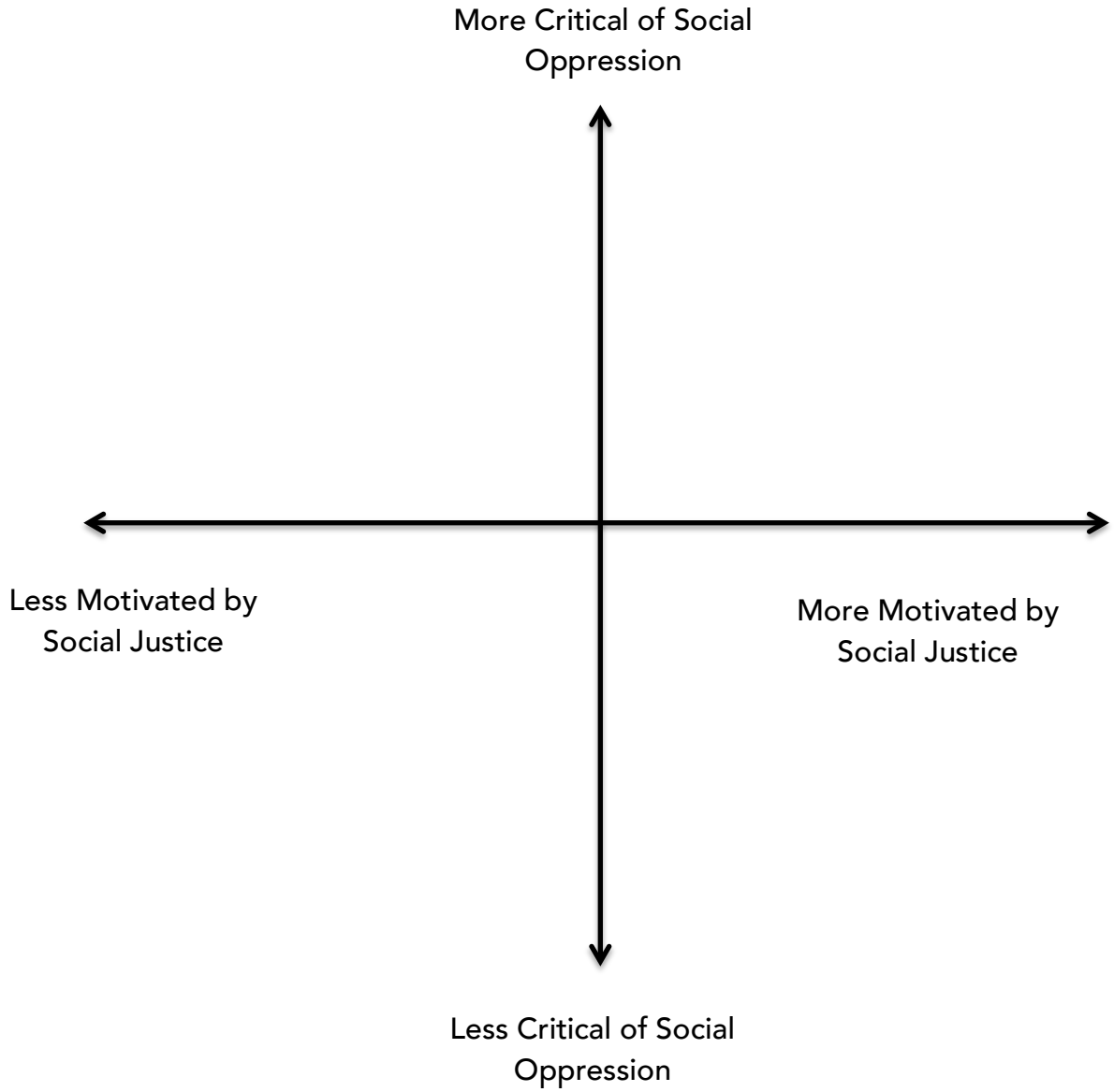
Data Elicitation

6. Elicit response about Transformative Resistance. What resonates with your own experience? Are there attitudes and actions that you hold or do that fall into these different quadrants?

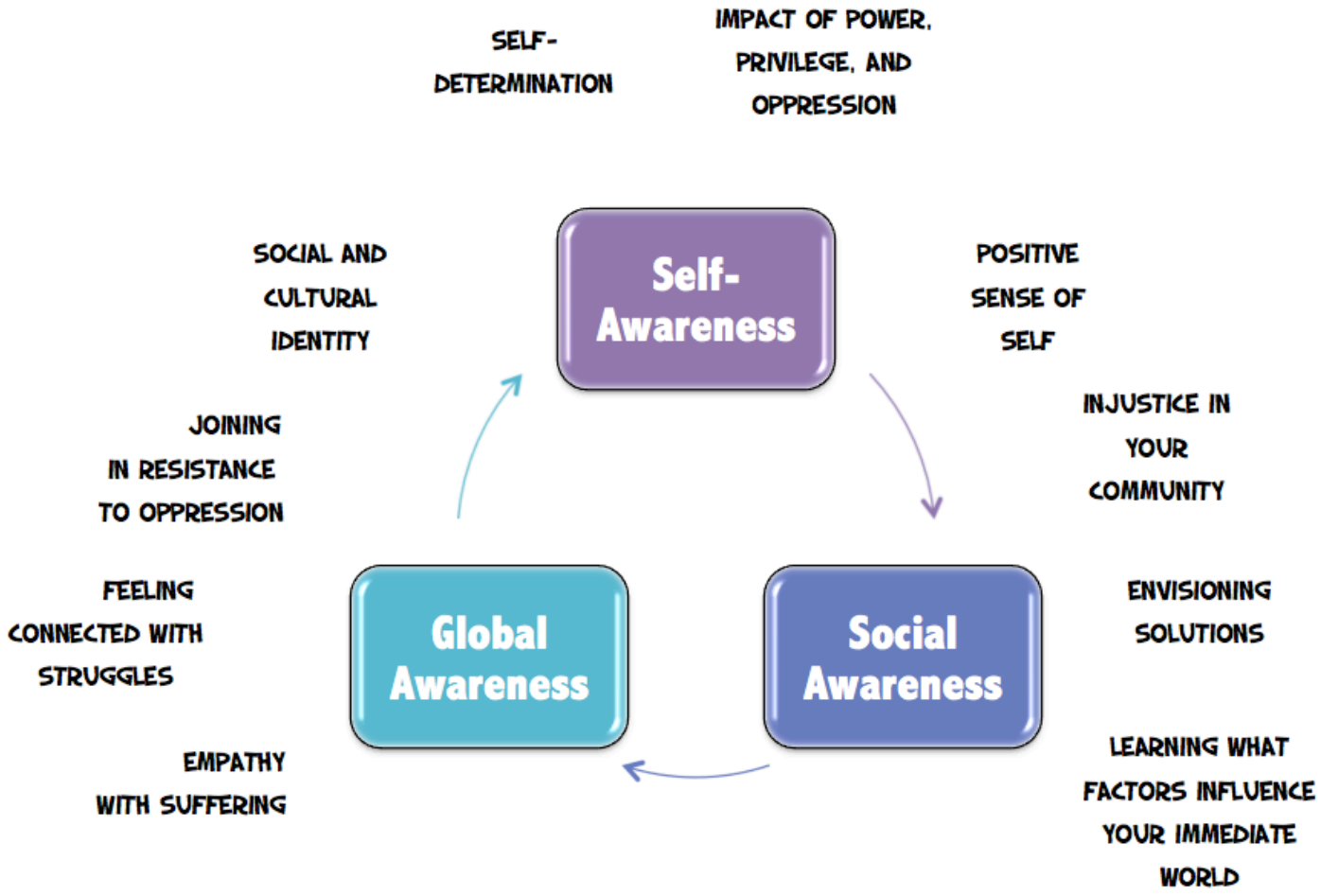
7. Elicit response about levels of critical consciousness. What resonates with your own experience? Are there attitudes and actions that you hold or do that fall into these different quadrants?

Appendix C: Models Presented in Interview

Transformational Resistance Model



Consciousness Model



Appendix D: Group interview Protocol

Food & Intro (20 min)

- Review schedule
- Go over what I did with everyone in terms of research
- Intro focus group:

The focus group is for validity as a part of my member checking.

"Hi everyone! Thanks so much for agreeing to meet up with me again. This group interview will be an opportunity for you to provide feedback to me on some connections between your interviews and for us to discuss the interview experience. If you would like, you can also take a look at your whole interview transcript when I finish transcribing them all. If there's anything you feel uncomfortable with, you can let me know and we can discuss taking it off the record. Is it okay if I record this session?"

Warm-up Questions (20 min)

1. Tell me how the interview went and the how the research process was?
2. **What words would you use to describe what we talked about in our interview?**
3. What are you interested in knowing from other peoples' interviews?
4. Based on your experiences in the interview and any other information about me, how would you describe your interpretation of my research topic or focus? What am I trying to find out?
5. **What did you feel like was my own personal bias?**
6. **There were sometimes when I was reading the interview transcripts and I wondered if it was stressful or you felt pressure to talk about being like a certain amount of "social-justice-y." Were there any times you felt pressured to answer in a particular way?**

Quotes & Themes (50 min)

****Tell them how awesome and varied these interviews were!!****

"I pulled out some quotes based on themes that I heard emerge in your interviews. First, let me know if you are comfortable sharing yours with this group (it won't have your name on it unless you want to share it). I can take it out if you are not comfortable. Then we will take a look at the themes and quotes that came out in the interviews. This will also become part of my research but is what we call a "member check." It's a chance for you to see what I'm working on and also to tell me if I'm kind of off in my interpretation.

So for class, I had to transcribe your interviews and also start to draw connections between your responses and the experiences that you shared with me. However, I am just one person, and I have my own interpretation. So what we will be doing together is a bit of the data

analysis process. This is a chance, if you are willing, to share your own interpretations. I tried my best to pull quotes with a variety of the major themes that I saw in our interviews, but of course, it is imperfect. But I tried not to only focus on one theme.

Hand out the quotes. Ask them to read the quotes, and add a title or label (with post-it) for it if it is clear to them. Then go around and share the labels. Encourage them to inquire about each others' labels. (20 min)

Continue to examine each others' quotes and create categories or draw relationships between the quotes.

1. **Tell me what you all think about the quotes. Do you relate to some more than others?** How does seeing other people's responses change your interpretation of your responses? Was there anything surprising?
2. **What themes do you see? What similarities and differences do you see?**
3. What kind of support do young people, particularly Asian American young people, need from social justice spaces?
4. What challenges or contradictions exist in social justice spaces?
5. What does social justice mean to you and others? Does reading these quotes shape your understanding of social justice?
6. I see you all challenging stereotypes and ideologies. What are they and how are you doing it?

Closing (5 min)

- Hand out gift cards
- Hand out transcripts

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