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Ethnicity, Class, Race, and Gender: Exploring Intersectionality in the Narratives of Thai
Immigrant Wives of White U.S. Men

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Sociology

by

Panu Suppatkul

September 2018

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Ethnicity, Class, Race, and Gender: Exploring Intersectionality in the Narratives of Thai
Immigrant Wives of White U.S. Men

by

Panu Suppatkul

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Sociology
University of California, Riverside, September 2018
Dr. Karen D. Pyke, Chairperson

While the dominant U.S. discourse depicts heterosexual Thai immigrant wives as
sexualized women motivated to out-marry white U.S. men to increase their economic
status, feminist scholars challenge this discourse by casting non-Western women who
participated in cross-racial international marriages with white Western men as
strategically engaging white hegemonic masculinity to resist the so-called "ethnic
masculinity." This study considers the shortcomings of these discourses and employs the
intersectionality framework to examine how the interplay between race, class, ethnicity,
and gender inform women's choices to engage in cross-racial international heterosexual
marriages. The data for this study includes interviews of 38 Thai immigrant heterosexual
wives from different social classes and ethnic backgrounds (e.g., Thai, Isan-Thai, and

Chinese-Thai). This study examines how the resistance of one form of oppression (e.g., gender) can rely on the perpetuation of other forms of oppression (like racism and class).

Chapter 3 examines how Thai wives construct the racialized masculinities of Thai and white U.S. men and the ways that they utilized those constructions in their marriages with white U.S. men. The findings suggest that scholars should not quickly interpret cross-racial international marriage as a strategy that Thai women employ to resist gender oppression of their homeland or coethnic men, especially when their perceptions are informed by oppressive racial ideologies that denigrate coethnic men as inferior to white Western men. Chapter 4 explores the gendered and racial stereotypes that Thai immigrant wives encounter in their everyday interactions with other people in the U.S. and in Thailand when they were visiting home. Chapter 5 examines the strategies that Thai wives engage in coping and responding to stereotypes placed upon them by the dominant discourses. The findings illustrate the powerful interplay of systems of oppression based on gender, race, and class. I argued that Thai wives constructed their versions of racialized femininity to challenge the negative stereotypes made about them in relation to the stereotype of white Western women. However, their constructions of femininity can uphold and perpetuate the traditional gender arrangements and belief in racial/ethnic essentialism at the same time.

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Chapter 1:

Introduction

In June 2016, I interviewed Suda, a 42-year-old Thai wife at a coffee shop in an affluent beach city in Southern California. She came from a well-off background of Chinese-Thai family and was a computer science lecturer at an international university in Thailand before coming to the U.S. She met her 62-year-old white U.S. engineer husband when he attended an academic conference in Thailand in the early 2000s. They developed a romantic relationship, and a year later, Suda came to pursue a Ph.D. in computer engineering in the U.S. Being self-funded in her first year, she later received teaching assistantships from her department until she graduated. She cohabited her husband who worked in the same academic field since her second year and married him four years later. After graduating, she had a job in engineering that earned more than $150,000 a year. At some point during our conversation, she stated:

> One of the reasons I am interested in participating in your study is because
> I want to help "**raise the mean**." I want to represent women who met a
> husband like normal people. Some people might have thought that Thai
> women would deliberately pursue white husbands because they lived a
> difficult life in Thailand and saw white men as a solution. I'm not like
> that. (emphasis added)

Suda was the first woman I interviewed, and the first to raise this concern to me, but she was not the last. The concern about being perceived as helpless women in need of

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economic security was a common theme that ran in the narrative accounts. The Thai term "*mia farang*," literally translated as a "Thai wife of a white man," usually is a derogatory term in Thai usage that comes with negative stereotypes (Sunanta 2009). Many Thais conflates *mia farang* with "*mia chao*," which refers to Thai women who provide sexual and housekeeping services to international male tourists in exchange for money. For Americans, foreign Asian brides are usually assumed to be either a "mail-order bride," – a disputed term referring to a woman who, with the help of an international marriage broker, corresponds with a man from another country by putting their images and contact information in catalogs or on websites, and then marries a man from that country (Zare and Mendoza 2011) or a "military bride," – a woman who met and married a U.S. military man who was deployed overseas (Yuh 2002). As Asian immigrant women, as non-native English speakers, and as interculturally and interracially married women, many Thai women were aware of the negative assumptions attached to them, and afraid of being associated with these labels (Charoensri 2011). Although Suda had a background that was far from those stereotypical images, her comments verified the negative view people might have on Thai wives of white men or *mia farang*.

For many Thais, another respondent, Irene would come to mind when asking them to think of an image of *mia farang*. Irene, a 36-year-old wife, is the only respondent who openly reveals to me that she was a sex worker, although I admitted that because of the stigma some respondents perhaps did not share this information with me. She knew Walter – her 52-year-old U.S. engineer husband through sex work five years ago. She told me that her life was like Julia Roberts' character in the movie "*Pretty Woman*,"

which is about a prostitute who found happiness with a rich man. Irene was born to a farming family in Isan region, the poorest part of Thailand, and had only six years of formal education. She had to work on the farm since she was twelve to help her family. Irene has three children out of wedlock, fathered by two different Thai men. She had her first son when she was 21, but the man, who was a factory worker, left for another woman few months later. She decided to leave her son with the man's parents in Isan and went to Bangkok for better-paid jobs. She told me that her son's father provided no support at all.

Irene had worked several jobs, such as an employee in a food court, a cook's helper in a kitchen, a worker in a garment factory, and a clothing retailer. None of the jobs paid highly. When she was 23, she met her second partner, a headwaiter, from her work at the restaurant and had two daughters with him. However, five years later, he left with another woman. She told me in detail about the financial predicament she encountered when her second partner left and how that affected her young children and old parents. At the age of 28, she found herself a single mom with three children, parents to take care of, and not enough financial support. A friend introduced her to sex work and talked about the economic benefit of doing sex work. Staying in the sex work, she could earn approximately 40,000 baht ($1,154) a month, which was more than double of the amount she earned from previous jobs.

Irene met Walter, who was an American tourist, in Pattaya as one of her clients. She did not only have sex with him in exchange of money, but also accompanied him everywhere for the rest of his one-week vacation in Thailand. They grew fond of each

other and exchanged contacts when he went back to the U.S. They communicated through international telephone calls and texts. He started wiring money to her regularly. Irene still worked at the bars, only drinking with clients but not going out with any men. She stated that Walter sent money so that she could withdraw from sex work and support her children. Six months later, Walter came back and asked Irene to go to the U.S. with him. At the time of interview, Irene and her two daughters from previous relationship lived with Walter in his apartment for five years. She did not have a child with Walter. She did not work outside home. Walter gave her $1,000 monthly for personal expense, supported all expenses of the two children who were in an American middle school, and provided an additional $300 monthly for her parents and son left behind in Thailand. She spent most of her times during the day cooking three meals for her husband and children, cleaning, watching TV and playing cards with other *mia farangs* who did not have a job in the afternoon. "I have nothing to hide about my past," Irene replied when asked why she chose to reveal her experience. She stated, "I know what other people might think about *mia farangs*, but I don't care as long as it is the way I can make my children and parents live comfortably. I want to share my story to show that I'm doing good for them."

At first glance, Irene seems to fit the negative stereotypes Thai people have about *mia farang*: she was a poor, former sex worker, who now relies solely on her husband and does not work outside of the home anymore. Many people would assume that she did not marry out of love, but for money. However, if ones look closely into the narratives given by most respondents in this study, they might find that, except for the fact that Irene was poor and a sex worker, the reasons that she and her husband fell in love were

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not much different from other Thai wives I interviewed. They get along well; they make each other laugh; and they support each other emotionally. They also devote themselves to home and family. In fact, many Thai women who came from middle-class backgrounds and had relatively good-paying jobs in Thailand before they became full-time housewives and dependent solely on their U.S. husbands once married too. Therefore, it was erroneous to assume that these women were lazy and helpless like the dominant discourse said about them.

Significance and Contributions of This Dissertation

This dissertation is about *mia farang* in the U.S. I examine romantic/conjugal relationships, immigrant and transnational experiences of Thai wives of white U.S. men who are, according to the normative narrative, assumed to be utilizing marriage as a mechanism for upward mobility in exchange for subservience and traditional values desired by white U.S. men. What is noticeably absent from this widely circulating discourse is that these women are not a homogenized group as they are portrayed by the mass media and some scholars. My study will offer an examination of how the interplay between race, class, ethnicity, and gender inform women's experiences in cross-racial international heterosexual marriages. The participants varied in their social class status, educational backgrounds, occupations, ethnicity, location in their life-courses, and the ways they met their husbands. Some, like Suda, were daughters of a well-off family who came to study in the U.S., then stayed and married; others, like Irene, grew up poor in rural Thailand. Some respondents divorced Thai men and viewed white men as making better husbands, others had financial responsibility for children and parents left behind in

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Thailand. At first glance, they seem to have very little in common with each other. However, as their narrative accounts unfold, they have many things in common. Among the commonalities include the preconceived idea about white masculinity, perceived stigma of being a Thai wife of white man, and expected role as a good wife. The women interviewed kindly disclosed their experiences that led them to marry and emigrate (or immigrate and marry); their perceived privileges and disadvantages of being a Thai wife of white man in U.S. society, and the ways in which they coped with these disadvantages.

Moreover, this dissertation calls for a reconsideration of recent feminist academic arguments that cast non-Western women who participated in cross-racial international marriages with white Western men as strategically engaging white hegemonic masculinity to resist the so-called "ethnic masculinity," but in turn, essentializing masculinities based on race (Kelsky 2001; Hirakawa 2004; Schaeffer-Grabiel 2004; Nemoto 2009). Such arguments reflect and reinforce the glorification and dominance of white masculinity (Pyke 2010a) and the hegemony of white Western masculinity in some post-colonial contexts (Kim and Pyke 2015). This study contributes to theoretical understandings of the construction of racialized gender, and the ways that interracial cross-national marriages are utilized in those constructions. Hence, when non-Western women seek to maximize their individual life chances through the pursuit of Western husbands, this should not automatically be interpreted as resistance to gender oppression in homeland. One can maximize one's life chances through adaptation and accommodation, and without resisting any form of domination (Kandiyoti 1988). This is particularly the case when such attempts to maximize one's life chances are informed by

dominant ideologies that cast local ethnic men as a homogenous group inferior to white Western men. When non-Western women claim they are pursuing romance with white Western men so as to avoid patriarchal romance with co-ethnic men in their homeland, we should not be so quick to interpret their actions as resisting local "ethnic" patriarchies, as some feminist scholars have done.

Theoretical Framework: Critical Theory and Intersectionality

The purpose of this dissertation is to better understand the diverse experience of Thai women who participate in cross-racial international marriage with white U.S. men by using critical and intersectional perspectives. Gramsci (1921) argues that the dominant social group is hegemonic, controlling not only authority and power, but ideology as well. The dominant group holds onto its power by virtue of its ability to use ideologies to manipulate subordinated groups. Thus, critical social theory questions and critiques the dominant ideologies and attempts to develop a mode of consciousness that can change the status quo (Agger 1991). It posits that we do not "blindly accept commonly touted explanations for the way things are" (Seccombe 1998:6). Rather, critical social theory highlights the power of social structures and ideologies that maintain and reproduce inequalities and oppressions (Pyke 2010b). Critical framework allows us to rethink and question the systems of oppression that usually favor the dominant group's interest yet appear to be normal and reflecting the best interests of all members of society (Pyke 1996). For example, the assumption that housekeeping, cooking, and taking care of children are the primary roles of a good wife in a functional family, or when non-white, non-Western women subscribe to white standards of beauty. For this particular study, a

critical perspective will be useful in examining how racial ideologies circulating in post-colonial contexts that denigrate non-Western men in the co-construction of white Western men as superior inform Thai women's marriage with white U.S. men. I will apply critical theory to the analysis of how the Thai wives construct white masculinity in relation to Thai or Asian masculinity.

The intersectionality framework offers a powerful theoretical approach to understand how class, race, and gender intersect to shape the experiences of inequalities for individuals. Intersectionality theory posits that social inequalities of race, class, and gender create overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination and disadvantage which cannot be considered as a single, monolithic social phenomenon. All individuals and groups possess varying amounts of penalty and privilege in one historically created system (Collins 2000). For example, U.S. white women are penalized by their gender but privileged by their race and citizenship status. In the U.S. context, non-Western/non-white immigrant wives are penalized by their race, gender, and foreign/immigrant status. Some of them may benefit from class privilege which many others do not have. Some might enjoy economic privileges while facing gender and racial discrimination, but others might have economic hardships and still experience racism and sexism in daily life. Depending on the context, an individual may be an oppressor, a member of an oppressed group, or simultaneously oppressor and oppressed (Nash 2008). An intersectionality framework allows closer examination of complex social realities which shapes individuals' identities than does studying a single social category in isolation from other categories (Purkayastha 2010). The mutually constitutive connections of class, race,

gender and other social categories have offered contemporary sociologists the opportunity to reconsider how some social categories are more salient than others in certain contexts (Yuval-Davis 2006; Nash 2008). Thus, people's experiences need to be understood in the context of power relations embedded in these social categories (Ghavami and Peplau 2012).

Drawing on critical and intersectionality theories, I propose to consider whether and how globally circulating ideologies that glorify white Western manhood and denigrate non-Western manhood might work to persuade non-Western women, making them more easily available to white heterosexual Western men as romantic and sexual partners. Further, given the matrix of intersecting systems of domination, it is important to consider that the resistance of one form of oppression (e.g., gender) can rely on the perpetuation of other forms of oppression (like racism and class) (Andersen 2005; Pyke 2010). My analysis will consider these complex dynamics.

Background on Thai Heterosexual Female Marriage Migrants in the U.S.

Married Thai women live throughout the U.S. with the concentration in California (U.S. Census Bureau 2015, see figure 1.1). They represent a unique group in marriages in terms of the race of their husbands. Thai women aged between 20 – 55 years old have the highest rates of immigration for marriage and highest percentages of marriages to white U.S. men (55.83 percent) among married women born in Asian countries (see figure 1.2). The data drawn from 1% of the IPUMS samples from 2011-2015 (Ruggles et al. 2015) shows that more than half of foreign-born, married Asian women in the U.S. have co-ethic husbands, except for the Thai and Japanese women who are more likely to marry

white U.S. men. It is important to note that Thai marriage migrants also married American men of other racial groups, but the percentage of those marriages have been minimal. Cross-racial international marriage between white U.S. men and Thai women has constituted the majority among Thai marriage migrants since the 1980s (Hidalgo and Bankston 2011), even though there has been a growing number of intra-Asia marriage migration (Kim 2010) and international marriages between Asian Americans and foreign-born Asians (Chong 2017) in recent years.

Figure 1.1 Geographical map of married Thai women in the U.S. from U.S. Census 2006-2010
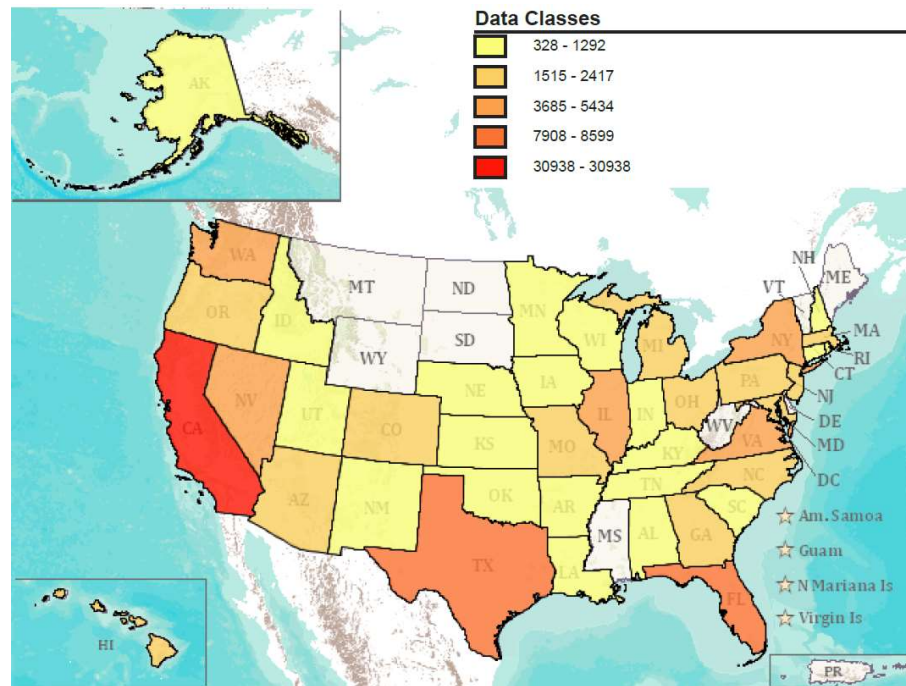
Figure 1.2 Married women aged 20-55, born in selected Asian countries and living in the U.S., 2011-2015
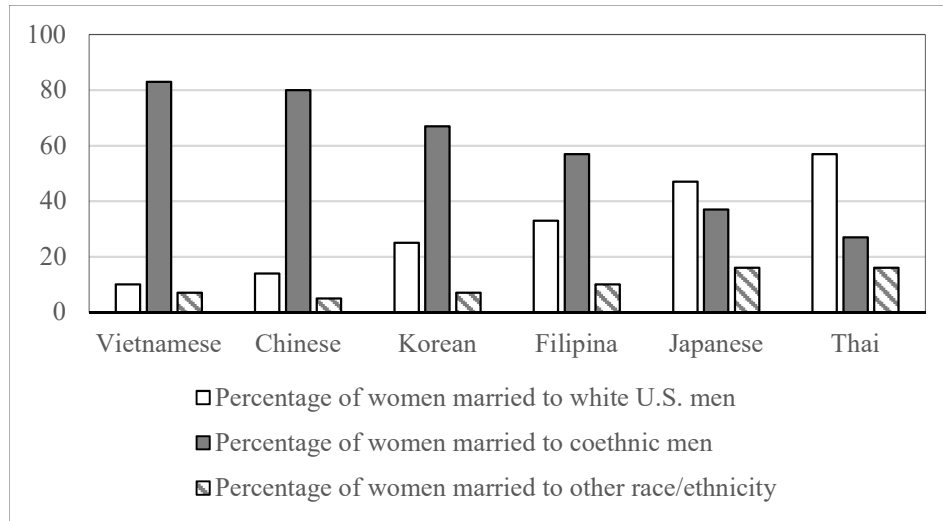
The same data (see Table 1.1) shows that, among 866 of native Thai wives of white U.S. men aged between 20 – 55 years old, 54.04 percent have lived the U.S. for ten years and more, and 33.26 percent married in the same year of immigration to the U.S. 48.50 percent were married in their 20s and 74.13 percent had married only once. In terms of citizenship status, naturalized U.S. citizen made up 50.12 percent of the total, while 49.88 percent were not U.S. citizens. The data invoked the popular discourse that portrayed immigrant brides as younger women married to much older men when 39.68 percent of Thai women married white U.S. men ten or more years older than them, regardless of whether it was the wife's first or later *marriage*. In terms of education, about 47.35 percent of Thai marriage migrants have earned a bachelor's degree or higher and over a quarter of those who earned a bachelor's degree or higher married white U.S. men who have lower educational attainment than them.

Many cross-racial international marriages between non-Western women and U.S. men also have historical linkages to international warfare and military invasions (Nagel 2003). Research studies suggest that marriage migration of Thai women with American men on a large scale had followed the stationing of American military personnel in Thailand during the 1960s and 1970s. For example, between 1980 to 1990, more than half of Thai women migrants, and 48.7 percent in 2000, were married to either current or former U.S. military men (Hidalgo and Bankston 2011). However, this trend shifted after the 2010s when more than half of the U.S. husbands were wage/salary workers in private companies, and less than one-fourth were either currently or previously in military, indicating the decline of marriage with U.S. military men over time.

From quantitative data, we have a broad picture of Thai immigrant wives in the U.S. and their husbands, but we know very little about how romantic relationships and marriages between Thai wives and their husbands are formed. We do not know how they find each other attractive, and why Thai women overwhelmingly marry white men. To answer these questions, I propose that we need to include a theoretical framework that address the intersection of race, class, and gender which shapes the experiences of women who participate in cross-national marriage.

Table 1.1 Demographic characteristics of Thai wives of white U.S. men 2011-2015

Characteristic	Frequency (n=886)	Percentage
Years in the U.S.		
Less than three years	86	9.93
3 to 5 years	155	17.90
5 to 9 years	157	18.13
10 years or more	468	54.04
Marriage Migration		
Married before migration	165	19.05
Married in the same year of migration	288	33.26
Married within 1 to 3 years of migration	139	16.05
Married after 4 years of migration	274	31.64
Age at Marriage		
18 to 29 years old	420	48.50
30 to 39 years old	334	38.57
40 years old and over	112	12.93
Times Married		
Married once	642	74.13
Married twice	194	22.40
Married thrice (or more)	30	3.46
Age Difference		
Husband is 10 years older or more	352	39.68
Husband is 6 to 9 years older	126	14.21
Husband is 2 to 5 years older	174	19.62
Within 1 year of each other	140	15.78
Wife is 2 to 5 years older	67	7.55
Wife is 6 to 9 years older	24	2.71
Wife is 10 years older or more	4	0.45
Citizenship		
Naturalized U.S. citizen	434	50.12
Not a citizen	432	49.88
Educational Attainment		
Less than high school	132	15.24
High school graduate	141	16.28
Some college	183	21.13
Bachelor's degree or higher	410	47.35
Military Link		
Husband currently in military	41	4.74
Veteran husband	123	14.20

Conclusion and Organization of This Dissertation

I began this chapter with narrative accounts from two respondents who had different backgrounds and experiences in marriage migration to the U.S., to debunk the homogeneous image of Thai immigrant wives that has been reproduced in dominant discourses of cross-racial international marriage. I draw on critical and intersectionality theories to examine how the intersection of race, class, gender, and ethnicity mutually constitute systems of oppression in forms of stereotypes about Thai wives of white U.S. men that are reproduced among Thais. Furthermore, I argue that we should reconsider the academic arguments made by some feminist scholars who attributed non-Western women's lack of attraction to coethnic men to the alleged "ethnic" male dominance, while reiterating the relational construction of white hegemonic masculinity that are informed by racism and neglecting the fact that systems of oppression are multifaceted. In addition, I provide some backgrounds on patterns of cross-racial international marriage between Thai women and white U.S. men from 2011-2015 (Ruggles et al. 2015).

In Chapter 2, I describe research methodology, design, rationale, sampling criteria, data collection, analytical strategy, issues of internal confidentiality, and the sample of this study in details.

Chapter 3 examines how the notion of white hegemonic masculinity inform Thai wives' cross-racial international marriage with white U.S. men. I analyze how the preconceived ideas about white Western masculinity combined with the notion of internalized racial oppression (Pyke 2010b) inform Thai wives' narrative accounts about

their experiences and romantic relationships with Thai and white Western men, leading to their marriages with white U.S. men.

Chapter 4 focuses on racial and gender stereotypes of Thai wives in cross-racial international marriage with white Western men. I explore the narrative accounts of Thai wives' experience with racial and gender assumptions that Thais and Americans make about them in their daily interactions. It reveals in this chapter that these stereotypes are widespread, including among the Thai wives themselves.

In Chapter 5, I explore the ways in which the Thai wives manage and cope with the stereotypes of being a "*mia farang*" – Thai wife of white man. Through their narrative accounts, I illuminate how the Thai wives employ various strategies to deflect the widespread negative racial and gender stereotypes about them. However, the consequences of utilizing these strategies prove that the interwoven nature of the structure of oppression are difficult to resist because each form of oppression does not exist separately from each other. Hence, the strategy that resists one form of oppression may be trapped into reinforcing the other.

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Chapter 2:

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs qualitative methodology, using conversational and in-depth interviews with 38 Thai wives, to examine how racial, gender, and class discourses inform their interracial cross-border marriage with white U.S. men. In-depth interview methods are suitable to grasp detailed descriptions about how the respondents give meanings to their experiences and constructed identities (Weiss 1994). The interview questions are open-ended to allow an account of events that follows from respondents' experiences (Esterberg 2002). By doing interviews, I could get the answers to my research questions, while still allowing unexpected responses from the interviewees' narrative accounts. These accounts can reveal underlying racial, gender, and class discourses that shape their spousal preferences and marriage choices. From the interviews, we can learn how these women express agency in their choice of partner, while acknowledging the power of social structures that influence their ideas and actions. This study also examines the ideas that the respondents have about their identity and status as foreign wives of white U.S. men and the meanings attached to such status.

In addition to conversational and in-depth interviews, I took observational field notes at two Thai Buddhist temples in Southern California that I had been attending so as to become involved in the local Thai community and "develop ongoing relations with the people in it and observe all the while what is going on" (Emerson et al. 2011:1). The

temples are ethnic communities where Thai immigrants gather for religious activities or socializing on weekends. I spent approximately six to seven hours at one temple on a weekly basis to observe social interactions and social practices of Thai immigrant wives, and the kind of social groupings that occur within ethnic communities. I examined if there occur any "othering" dynamics among Thai immigrant wives, dividing, for example, Thai and Isan-Thai women or highly-educated and less-educated women. I also observed the social interactions between white U.S. husbands and others at the temple – how white U.S. men interact and position themselves in a social context that is majority Thai. The total times I spent at two temples combined were approximately 120 hours from April to August 2016. Spending time in the field interacting with Thai immigrant wives and their husbands allowed me to observe "not just what people say they do, but what they actually do" over time (Whitehead 2005).

At the temples, I introduced myself as a Ph.D. student in sociology from University of California, Riverside. As I was doing a research in a community that I share ethnicity, language, and culture with, I acknowledged that my identity as a Thai Ph.D. student provided me with credibility in talking to Thai people at the temples. I asked permissions from the monks to conduct research at the temples and they introduced me to people at the temple during their weekly announcements. Some respondents took interest in my research project and spent hours talking to me and sharing their unique experiences and highlighted that I should help them sharing their stories to the world. Some respondents enthusiastically introduced me to other respondents. However, my identity as a cisgender male studying the marriage lives of Thai women perhaps prevented me from

obtaining some information regarding their romantic/marital relationships. Although the gender of the interviewer is not an insurmountable obstacle in gaining rapport and obtaining reliable data from the respondents, it is highly possible that some respondents may "filter" their responses in the ways that do not embarrass the interviewer or themselves in opposite-sex interview, for example speaking negatively of the opposite sex (Williams and Heikes 1993). Talking to white U.S. husbands was more challenging than interviewing their wives. I felt that the white U.S. husbands I approached were intimidated by the formality of a research interview and the protocols specified by the Institutional Review Board. I also had an impression that they were not willing to share their private lives. As a result, many of the husbands declined to be interviewed. Only two husbands from the temples agreed to participate in this project.

The Rationale of Sampling and Eligibility Criteria

I choose to study Thai women in cross-border marriage with white U.S. men not only because I am a native Thai, but also because Thai women represent a unique pattern in cross-border marriages to the U.S. That is to say, Thai women aged between 20 – 55 years old have represented the highest rates of immigration for marriage and highest percentages of marriages to white U.S. men among women born in Asian countries (Ruggles et al. 2015; U.S. Census Bureau 2015). Moreover, the political history and colonial experiences of Thailand are quite different from its neighbor countries. Unlike Vietnamese, Lao, Hmong, and Cambodian immigrants who came to America as refugees after the Vietnam War, only a few of Thai immigrants fled their homelands to seek asylum in the U.S. due to political reasons (Gall and Natividad 1995). Unlike the

Philippines, Thailand does not have a long history of colonialism and neo-colonialism with the U.S. The numbers of Thai immigrant population in America are also much lower than dominant Asian immigrant groups like Chinese, Filipino, Vietnamese and Korean. This means Thai immigrants are less likely to know someone or have relatives in the U.S. than immigrants from the countries which have longer history of U.S. immigration. Still, the percentages of Thai women married to white men are the highest, compared with other Asian women in the U.S. These unique characteristics of Thai immigration to the U.S. inspire me to explore the different life paths of Thai women who have participated in marriage migration to the U.S.

To be eligible to participate in this study, the respondents must be self-identified as heterosexual Thai adult women who are married and living with white U.S. husbands for at least three years, ensuring they have been adequately exposed to American culture and adjusted to conjugal life. The respondents must be born in Thailand and have married their white U.S. husbands later than the year 1975 to ensure that they come from a later cohort than that of the Vietnam era "military brides," whose marriages are particularly linked to warfare (Yuh 2002; Nagel 2003). The respondents were allowed to vary by number of marriages and number of children with similar proportions of women with and without U.S. born children across the samples. To increase the opportunity to obtain respondent who were willing to be interviewed, I did not control the geographic location of respondents.

For the purpose of gathering a sample from diverse social class backgrounds, I employed theoretical sampling to recruit respondents with certain characteristics (Glaser

and Strauss 1967). The purpose of having three subsamples was to capture class differences among respondents. While some studies suggest that people in the host society view immigrants with high socioeconomic status through the lens of a positive stereotype, for example being smart and having a strong work ethic (Wijeyeratne 2012; Lee and Zhou 2014), other studies point out that immigrants' high level of socioeconomic status do not necessarily guarantee privileged treatment in the host society (Woo 2000; Constable 2003; Leinonen 2012). Building on these opposing arguments, my study will examine how respondents' social class backgrounds inform their experiences in cross-racial international marriage. While acknowledging the slipperiness of the class concept, I used a combination of respondents' family's primary economic condition when they were growing up and their parents' occupations as proxies in determining respondents' locations in the class structure as children. I was aware that there was a possibility that the respondents might give a modest, or conservative, answer on their family's primary economic condition, thus, I would pay close attention to the narratives about respondents' familial responsibilities while they were growing up from the interviews. The reasons for using the parents' economic status and occupations instead of the respondents' occupation is that some of them were students and still depended on their parents' financial support when they got married. Moreover, scholarly work suggests that social class and status are more effectively explained at the level of the family rather than in terms of an individual success and prestige (Gillies 2005; Singh-Manoux et al. 2003). Drawing on Erikson and Goldthorpe's (1992) occupation-based class scheme, respondents are stratified in the following manner: respondents whose parent(s) were in

professional occupations, middle- to upper-level managerial and supervisory positions, and larger industrial business owners who own the means of production are classified as upper-middle class; those whose parent(s) were in routine non-manual employees in administration and commerce, government employees, small proprietors, and other service workers are classified as middle class; and those whose parent(s) were manual workers, semi- and unskilled workers, and contract agricultural laborers who do not have lands or tenements of their own are classified as lower class. I considered these occupational classifications together with the respondents' narrative accounts about their hardships as children in determining their class backgrounds.

Data Collection

I located respondents through a mix of purposive sampling and snowball sampling methods from multiple sites. I recruited respondents through my personal contacts and fieldwork at two Thai Buddhist temples in California from April to August 2016. To obtain data, I approached the respondents by introducing myself, and asking them to participate in the study by completing the survey first. The survey gleaned the basic demographic data of respondent and their husbands. When the respondents agreed to participate in the study, I would schedule an interview at public place (e.g., the temple, coffee shop, restaurant), or via phone.

Due to difficulties of getting respondents from the temples and concerns about relational confidentiality that may occur when respondents know each other (Tolich 2004), I also recruited respondents through the Internet from April 2016 to August 2017 by posting a participation inquiry with online questionnaire survey on two Facebook

groups of Thai immigrants in the U.S. and got responses from people who were willing to be interviewed. Of the 38 respondents, I recruited fourteen from two Thai temples, fourteen from the Internet, and ten from personal contacts. Most (27 of 38) lived in California, two in Washington, and one each in Alaska, Delaware, Minnesota, Maine, Maryland, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island, and Texas.

I conducted face-to-face interviews with 21 respondents and phone interviews with 17 respondents. I conducted the interviews with all the wives in Thai, allowing respondents to speak with greater facility. As I am a native Thai speaker, Thai is my first and primary language. Interviews with the husbands were in English. I audio-recorded all but six phone interviews. For non-audio-recorded interviews, I took notes and wrote down exact quotes when possible. I wrote a summary of all interviews immediately after they ended. Face-to-face and phone interviews lasted from one to two hours, and a small number lasted up to three hours.

The interview guide for the respondents included open-ended questions about respondents' family when they were growing up—to uncover respondents' social class and ethnic background, ideas about preferences for a spouse, dating experiences, ideas about Thai women dating or marrying white Western men as they grew up, how they met their husbands, ideas about the U.S. before they migrated, what attracted them to their current husband (and former husband(s) and boyfriend(s) where relevant), and ideas they had about U.S. society. I asked them to describe their migration to the U.S., work, household duties, things they like and dislike about their husbands, and daily interactions with other people in the U.S, for example husbands' family members, colleagues, co-

workers, friends, neighbors, and strangers. These people included Thais in the U.S. I also asked them to describe things people said to them upon learning they are Thai wives of white U.S. men and the locations and specific events where these interactions occurred. For example, if they have children, I asked about their interactions in school settings, with teachers or the parents of their children's friends. If they work, I asked about interactions with their co-workers. I also asked about their interactions with in-laws and let them provide examples of actual encounters, and I used additional probes when necessary. I adapted the interview guide from existing studies on interracial cross-border marriages (Kim 2008; Sunanta 2009; Nemoto 2009; Morgan 2009; Chuenglertsiri 2012).

Analytical Strategy

In analyzing data, I transcribed the interviews in Thai. I employed a constant comparative method (Glaser 1965) to code interview data into relevant thematic categories and compared respondents' descriptions within and across the respondents' social class backgrounds. I read through all the transcripts of the completed interviews, identified and organized the key concepts and recurring themes in Thai, using codes, when analyzing the data. I also analyzed coded interviews and respondents' demographic data to identify similarities and differences within and across subsamples. I later translated coded interviews to English for those relevant portions used in presenting the data in this study.

In the process of analysis, I first engaged a within-group analysis of each subsample who has similar class backgrounds. I identified similarities and differences between those respondents and focused on factors that distinguish different patterns (for

example, whether the respondents were employed or unemployed, have children or not, or what kinds of jobs they do). Also, I looked for similarities and differences across the three subsamples. Comparison across groups allowed me to identify how these differences shaped the ideas that Thai wives had about racial and gender stereotypes, and the ways they interpreted the social meanings they gave to other people who treated them in particular situations, and how they responded to those situations.

Issues of Internal Confidentiality

Characteristics of qualitative research could raise some concerns about ethical issues, especially when studying people in small groups within ethnic communities or dyads of husband and wife. Although the "external" confidentiality is assured—no outsider would know who these people are, "internal" confidentiality is difficult to maintain because there is high probability that the "insiders" or anyone who closely know the respondents and a particular research setting could identify the respondents when the data is presented (Tolich 2004). In this study, the insiders include the husbands who know that I interviewed their wives and Thai wives who recommended their friends to me in snowball sampling. In conducting this research, I was aware of this issue and tried my best to avoid information that might be damaging to respondents if read by insiders. I followed the approaches suggested by experienced qualitative research scholars (Weiss 1994; Baez 2002; Wiles et al. 2008; Guenther 2009) to minimize problems of internal confidentiality and relational informants. First, I addressed the issues of confidentiality to all respondents at the time of data collection, through consent form statements, that the data will be presented in academic conferences, journal articles, and dissertation,

allowing them to acknowledge who might be the audiences. All name and identifying information will not be reported as I used pseudonyms for all person names and places. Names of specific places are replaced by a generic term (e.g., using the term such as "an affluent beach city" instead of Santa Monica or Honolulu). Moreover, the concern about internal confidentiality was the reason I decided to include respondents from the Internet, rather than interviewing people from geographically convenient locations (two Thai temples in Southern California) which made research sites easily traceable. In presenting data, I used a broad term to identify respondents' and husbands' occupations. For example, a job as an aerospace engineer became "job in engineering." To minimize the chance that husbands could identify the wife respondents from descriptive quotes, when the respondents gave sensitive comments about their spouses, or described specific or unique incidents that could be identifiable by their spouses, I omitted the pseudonyms of those who said them and made sure that those quotes were presented in isolation from other data from the same person (Saunders et al 2015). This process of removing identifiers was done after the coding and analyzing steps (Kaiser 2009).

The Sample

The sample of 38 Thai wives range in age from 28 to 50 years old, with a mean age of 38 years old. Respondents have lived in the U.S. between 3 and 24 years, and average is 11 years. They have been married to their current husband between 3 and 15 years, with an average of seven years. More than half of respondents (26 of 38) had never married or cohabited with men prior to their current marriage, while the remaining 12 had either been married or cohabited with a man other than their husband prior to their

marriage. Tables 2.1 provides a summary list and descriptions of the 38 wife respondents, including their names, ages, current occupations, ethnicity, education, years in the U.S., years of their current marriage, and their husbands' ages and occupations.

Classified by their parents' economic status and occupations, eight respondents came from upper-middle class families; sixteen came from middle-class families; and fourteen came from lower income families. Most respondents (34 of 38) had jobs in Thailand, except for four respondents who were college students, or had just graduated, when they came to the U.S. and married. Currently, seventeen respondents are employed full-time, ten are part-timers, and eleven are housewives.

In terms of the respondents' educational backgrounds, four of the 38 reported having less than a high school education, and three had completed high school. One respondent dropped out of the university in her junior year. Seventeen of the 38 earned a bachelor's or higher degree in Thailand and one earned a bachelor's degree in the U.S. The remaining thirteen earned a bachelor's degree in Thailand and, then a graduate degree in the U.S. In terms of ethnicity, nine of the 38 grew up in Isan and identified as Isan-Thai. Three identified as Chinese-Thai. The remaining 26 identified as Thai. The respondents varied by skin tones, with 18 had dark-skin tones, 12 had medium-skin tones, and eight had light-skin tones.

Twenty-one respondents have children of their own. Of the 21 respondents, thirteen have U.S.-born children with their current husband only. One respondent has a U.S.-born child from a previous marriage with a white U.S. man. Seven respondents have children from their previous relationship with Thai men in Thailand prior to their current

marriage. Of the seven respondents, two (Jenny and Sarika) also have U.S.-born children with their current husband.

Table 2.1 Sample characteristics

Name	Age/ Occupation	Ethnicity/ Skin tone	Education (Highest degree/ Number of years)	Years in the U.S./ Years of current marriage	Husband's Age/ Occupation	No. of children in current marriage
Thai wives from upper-middle-class families						
Suda	41/ engineer	Chinese-Thai/light	Ph.D. (U.S.)	12/7	62/ engineer[1]	0
Kai	42/catering service	Thai/dark	M.A. (U.S.)	18/11	39/ lawyer	1 (6 y/o)
Kob	42/ engineer	Thai/dark	M.S. (U.S.)	19/8	44/ engineer	1 (6 y/o)
Arunee	38/ housewife[2]	Thai/medium	M.S. (U.S.)	15/8	49/ computer analyst	2 (6 and 2 y/o)
Wan	38/ housewife	Thai/medium	M.B.A. (U.S)	9/8	37/ programmer	2 (2 and 1 y/o)
Jeab	28/fashion designer	Thai/dark	B.A. (U.S.)	4/3	29/ photographer	0
Niki	33/grocery store owner	Thai/light	15 years (TH)	11/10	36/ grocery store owner	1 (10 y/o)
Pan	30/ freelance translator	Thai/dark	B.A. (TH)	3/3	43/ business analyst	0
Thai wives from middle-class families						
Em[3]	50/ housewife	Isan/medium	M.A. (TH)	7/6	62/ scientist[4]	0
Angel	34/ waitress	Thai/dark	B.A. (TH)	12/6	42/ sale manager	0
Chompu	32/ restaurant manager	Thai/dark	M.B.A. (U.S.)	4/3	38/ lawyer	0
Minnie	45/ housewife	Chinese-Thai/light	M.B.A. (U.S.)	19/21[5]	43/ engineer	1 (20 y/o)

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[1] Suda's husband divorced a white U.S. woman and has a 21-year-old son from his previous marriage living elsewhere.

[2] Arunee used to work as a food researcher until she had her first child after her second year of marriage.

[3] Em divorced a Thai husband and has a 20-year-old daughter from her previous marriage living in Thailand.

[4] Em's husband divorced two white U.S. women and has adult children living elsewhere.

[5] Minnie earned a U.S. degree but went back to work in Thailand and married her U.S. husband in Thailand. They lived in Thailand for two years before moving to the U.S.

Table 2.1 Continued

Name	Age/ Occupation	Ethnicity/ Skin tone	Education (Highest degree/ Number of years)	Years in the U.S./ Years of current marriage	Husband's Age/ Occupation	No. of children in current marriage
Thai wives from a middle-class family (continued)						
Bonnie	28/ waitress	Thai/medium	B.S. (TH)[6]	4/3	28/carrier service	0
Sasi	40/research associate	Thai/light	Ph.D. (U.S.)	9/7	39/ engineer	2 (6 and 4 y/o)
Natt	41/social science researcher	Thai/medium	Ph.D. (U.S.)	11/7	42/lawyer	0
Jean	37/ part-time sale associate	Thai/dark	M.B.A. (U.S.)	9/8	43/school teacher	2 (7 and 5 y/o)
Gem	40/ housewife	Thai/medium	B.A. (TH)	11/11	37/banker	2 (4 and 1 y/o)
Sukon	33/ airline staff	Chinese-Thai/light	B.A. (TH)	5/3	28/customer service	0
Mary[7]	40/ housewife	Thai/medium	B.A. (TH)	4/4	66/retired electrician[8]	0
Noi[9]	40/ part-time waitress	Thai/dark	B.A. (TH)	11/11	57/ automotive business owner[10]	0
Naree	44/part-time waitress	Thai/dark	B.A. (TH)	9/9	44 / programmer	2 (9 and 8 y/o)
Kalaya	38/ housewife	Thai/light	B.A. (TH)	9/9	41/electrician	2 (5 and 4 y/o)
Joy	45/ housewife	Thai/medium	B.A. (TH)	12/12	65/account executive[11]	0
Sarika[12]	50/ housewife	Thai/dark	12 years (TH)	24/24	48/engineer	1 (22 y/o)

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[6] Bonnie was studying a master's degree in science at the time of the interview.

[7] Marry divorced a Thai man and has two children from her previous marriage. Her 21-year-old son lives in Thailand, while her 14-year-old daughter lives with her and her husband in the U.S.

[8] Marry' husband divorced a white U.S. woman and has two adult sons living elsewhere.

[9] Noi cohabited a Thai man.

[10] Noi's husband divorced two white U.S. women but they did not have children.

[11] Joy's husband's ex-wife passed away due to cancer. Joy was her acquaintance and caregiver.

[12] Sarika divorced a Thai man and a white U.S. man prior to her current marriage. She has one adult daughter from her first marriage with a Thai man living elsewhere in the U.S.

Table 2.1 Continued

Name	Age/ Occupation	Ethnicity/ Skin tone	Education (Highest degree/ Number of years)	Years in the U.S./ Years of current marriage	Husband's Age/ Occupation	No. of children in current marriage
Thai wives from lower-income families						
Ploy	40/nurse	Thai/ medium	M.N. (U.S.)	15/15	49/ military trainer	1 (5 y/o)
Tu	46/nurse	Isan/dark	B.N. (TH)	6/6	70/ lawyer[13]	0
Kate[14]	45/nurse	Isan/dark	B.N. (TH)	7/7	55/scientist[15]	0
Racheal	30/deli clerk	Thai/ medium	B.S. (TH)	7/5	34/ park ranger	0
Nan	32/hairdresser	Thai/ medium	B.A. (TH)	6/6	34/ salesperson	0
May	32/housewife	Isan/dark	B.A. (TH)	6/6	34/ military officer	1 (6 y/o)
Jenny[16]	45/housewife	Thai/dark	9 years (TH)	18/18	45/ navy engineer	2 (18 and 5 y/o)
Pattra	28/waitress	Isan/dark	6 years (TH)	3/3	52/ salesperson[17]	0
Mai[18]	43/housewife	Thai/light	9 years (TH)	6/6	55/engineer[19]	0
Wassana	31/community developer	Isan/ dark	M.A. (U.S.)	5/3	28/ journalist	0
Ratana[20]	45/jeweler	Isan/dark	B.A. (TH)	24/6	52/jeweler[21]	0
Irene[22]	36/housewife	Isan/dark	4 years (TH)	5/5	52/ engineer	0
Rin[23]	40/cook	Thai/light	6 years (TH)	21/3	40/ engineer[24]	0
Rose	30/ manicurist	Isan/ medium	9 years (TH)	10/10	47/maintenance worker[25]	0

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[13] Tu's husband divorced a white U.S. woman.

[14] Kate divorced a Thai man and has an 18-year-old son living with her ex-husband in Thailand.

[15] Kate's husband divorced a foreign-born Korean woman and has two children (age 15 and 14 years old) that he shares parenting time with his ex-wife in the U.S. They live with him and Kate three days a week.

[16] Jenny divorced a Thai man and has a 25-year-old son living with her and her current husband in the U.S.

[17] Pattra's husband divorced a white U.S. woman.

[18] Mai divorced a Thai man and has a 21-year-old son living with her ex-husband in Thailand.

[19] Mai's husband divorced a white U.S. woman.

[20] Ratana divorced a white U.S. man prior to her current marriage.

[21] Ratana's husband divorced a white U.S. woman and has two adult children. One of his children (age 25 years old) from his previous marriage lives with Ratana and her husband.

[22] Irene has a 15-year-old son living in Thailand from her previous relationship with a Thai man. She has other two children from a relationship with a different Thai man. her children (age 12 and 11 years old) from her second partner live with her and her current husband in the U.S.

[23] Rin divorced a white U.S. man and has a 21-year-old son living with her ex-husband.

[24] Rin's husband divorced a foreign-born Korean wife and has two children living with his ex-wife.

[25] Rose's husband divorced a white U.S. woman and has a 14-year-old daughter living with him and Rose.

The husbands range in age from 28 to 70 years old, with a mean age of 45 years. Of the 38 husbands, 26 are in their first marriage. Of the twelve husbands who had been married prior to their current marriage, seven had children from a previous marriage, but only two lived with them at the time of interview and one husband shared parenting time with his ex-wife. Of the twelve husbands who had been married prior to their current marriage, two divorced a foreign-born Korean wife, and one had a Thai wife who passed away prior to the current marriage. The other nine husbands divorced white U.S. wives prior to the current marriage. A high proportion of husbands worked in professional occupations. They were, to name just a few, engineers, lawyers, computer programmers, and scientists. Five of husbands worked in unskilled and semiskilled occupations such as sales associate, customer service, mail carrier, and maintenance worker. However, none of the wives and husbands revealed their economic struggles to me during the interviews.

Of the 38 husbands, I interviewed only seven husbands who agreed to participate. There were several reasons I could not get to interview as many husbands as I had planned to. For example, some wives told me that they did not want their husbands to know that they participated in my study. Some wives asked their husbands, but they turned me down due to privacy reasons. So, I decided to drop the husband respondents from the analysis. Since the interview data from husbands were not the main focus of this study, I used their interview data as supplementary information to compare with the interview data provided by the Thai wives.

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Chapter 3:

"The Perks of Being White Men": How Thai Immigrant Wives Construct Racialized

Masculinities in Their Marriages with White U.S. Men

Chapter Summary

Drawing on interviews with thirty-eight Thai immigrant wives of white U.S. men, I examine how the positive imageries of white Western masculinity inform their cross-racial international marriage with white U.S. men. The study identifies the three patterns from the Thai wives' narrative descriptions about their dating experiences with Thai and white Western men, including their current husbands. These patterns include 1) the preconceived admiration of white masculinity; 2) the racialization of positive experiences with white men and negative experiences with Thai men in their co-construction of white and Thai masculinities; 3) the ways respondents treat bad experiences with white men as individual flaws without generalizing negative traits to all white men. These dynamics reveal the racial hierarchies of masculinity and internalized form of racial oppression that shape dating and spousal choices across cultures.

Introduction

Studies on cross-national romance and marriage between women from poorer countries and men from wealthier countries have gone through shifts in emphases over the past decades. Previous scholarship on international migration posited that global inequalities shaped sexual desires and fantasies among people living in different

countries. That is, within a heteronormative, male-dominant ideology, women from poorer countries, who allegedly have economic security and upward geographical mobility as primary motives, perceive Western men from richer countries as a more desirable romantic partner than coethnic men (Kim 2010). At the same time, men from richer Western countries, in hoping to trade off their Western status, view women from poorer countries as sexually exotic and easily available (Stoler 1992).

Focusing on this paradigm, early academic discussions on international marriage were often characterized by the discourses of the 'mail-order bride' (MOB), a disputed term referring to women who seek a husband through correspondence by putting their images and contact information in catalogs or on websites (Tolentino 1996), and/or the discourses of 'sex tourism' in which men from wealthier countries (e.g., the U.S. and Western Europe) travelled to poorer countries (e.g., Asia, Latin America, Caribbean and Eastern Europe), where they met local women in the sex trade before bringing them home (Brennan 2001; Cohen 2003). The images of mail-order brides and former sex workers largely contributed to the perpetual and homogenized depiction of women who participate in this marriage either as passive victims who are highly vulnerable to abuse by their husbands or alleged global 'gold-diggers' who marry simply for money (Narayan 1995). Some academic literature put mail-order brides and sex workers together as racialized and sexualized others without careful consideration of internal variations within marriage migrant women's groups (Kim 2010). The normative narrative suggested non-Western women were utilizing marriage as a mechanism for upward mobility in

exchange for subservience and traditional values desired by middle-class, older Western men as opposed to allegedly "liberated" white Western women.

Contemporary feminist scholars shifted from the discourse that focused on women's victimization to an emphasis on women's agency and resistance to coethnic male dominance via participation in cross-border marriages with Western men. Focusing on individual choices from the perspective of the non-Western women, recent feminist studies posit that women actors hope to achieve a variety of expectations through cross-border marriage to men in Western countries, namely the fantasy of a gender egalitarian and faithful middle-class husband (Schaeffer-Grabiel 2004; Nemoto 2009) and the progressiveness and liberated status of women associated with Western societies (Kelsky 2001; Hirakawa 2004; Suksomboon 2009; Bulloch and Fabinyi 2009). These feminist scholars framed non-Western women's pursuit of Western men as resisting the backwardness of ethnic male dominance in the homeland. They thus pursued Western romance and marriage and internalized the notion that coethnic men are uniformly patriarchal, while assuming that white Western men are less patriarchal and authoritarian.

Intersectional feminist scholars such as Matsuda (1996), Andersen (2005), and Pyke (2010a) contend that this scholarly argument has some limitations because when resisting one form of dominance (e.g., gender), it downplays the significance of other structural forms of inequality (e.g., race and class) by neglecting the fact that resistance and complicity can co-occur. For example, when women might believe that they are resisting gender oppression in the homeland or ethnic culture by turning away from coethnic men who they might regard as more gender oppressive than white Western men,

their perception is not the same as an empirical fact, particularly if their perceptions are informed by oppressive racial ideologies circulating in post-colonial contexts that denigrate coethnic men as inferior to white Western men (Pyke 2010a; Kim and Pyke 2015). Many women from Asian countries have romanticized notions of white Western masculinity before immigrating to a Western country or before having been in a romantic relationship with a white man, demonstrating how racial ideologies influence their spousal selection (Hirakawa 2004; Kim 2006; Esara 2009).

Instead of treating ethnic patriarchy as real and ethnic men as lacking variation without empirical evidence, this chapter examines Thai immigrant wives' narrative descriptions of coethnic men in Thailand and white men in the U.S. to see if they are influenced by the notions of racialized masculinities that coincide with those that circulate the globe. The main question I will address is whether they romanticize white Western masculinity over subordinated ethnic masculinity. And if they do, how do they reveal these racialized stereotypes and desires in their narrative accounts about spousal selection when describing their white U.S. husbands in relation to Thai men? As I explore racial stereotypes that affect immigrant wives' romantic desires and their marriages to white U.S. men, I will review the literature on the globally circulating notion of white Western masculinity and its dominance in the world gender order in the next section.

Global Hegemony of White Masculinity

Hegemonic masculinity refers to a configuration of masculine practices deemed to be worthy, complete, and superior to other forms of masculinities, as well as femininities—in reproducing hierarchy and domination (Chen 1999; Heath 2003; Connell

and Messerschmidt 2005). It draws on the Gramscian conception of hegemony as domination characterized by the combination of coercion and consent. That is, it involves winning the consent of the oppressed groups in the ways that appear normal (Donaldson 1993). Hegemonic masculinity cannot be defined by a fixed set of masculinity traits because its meanings and usages are constructed through power relations at different temporal and spatial contexts, depending on how people in specific cultural arenas and historical moments perceive the ideal form of masculinity (Kim and Pyke 2015). What is deemed hegemonic masculinity, in different contexts (e.g., local, regional, and global), can vary from noxious practices that promote male dominance, such as engaging in physical violence or having sexual relationships with many women, to behaviors that serve the interests or desires of women, such as being an involved family man or a gender egalitarian knight (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005:840). However, in Western contexts, an ideal type of hegemonic masculinity is associated with class-privileged heterosexual white men who display economic and political power, leadership, and the civilized manners of gentlemen (Connell 1987) and are nurturing and highly involved with their family (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Messner 1994). This form of masculinity is constructed as superior to all other masculinities in the globalizing world (Connell and Wood 2005; Kimmel 2010; Stanley 2011). This notion plays a crucial part in maintaining inequality among women and men through the ways that only white heterosexual middle- and upper-class men can reaffirm their superiority over working-class men, men of color, homosexual men, and women. For example, class-privileged white men can juxtapose their polite gentility and nurturing characteristics with the sexist and hypermasculine

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characteristics attributed to some non-Western/non-white and/or lower-class men to cover up and enjoy the structural gender inequality in their lives, disguising themselves as exemplars of gender egalitarianism in their relations with women (Pyke 1996). In this sense, class and racial inequalities are produced and reproduced simultaneously with gender inequality.

The notion of white hegemonic masculinity has spread globally via the economic and political expansion of colonial empires, creating global racialized masculinity hierarchy in which imperialist white masculinity is on the top (Connell 2005). For the white Western masculinity to establish its hegemony, non-Western, non-white men and women must use this form of masculinity as a reference to resist their local or regional forms of masculinity or accept that their forms of masculinities are inferior to white Western masculinity (Kim and Pyke 2015). For example, South Korean women, both single and married, desire that their husbands and Korean men should adopt the ideal traits of white American masculinity as caring, gender progressive, and emotionally expressive – traits they perceive are lacking in Korean men. (Kim 2006). This notion leads to the racial gendered stereotypes that all Korean men are patriarchal.

In contrast to white Western masculinity, masculinities associated with non-white and/or non-Western men are subject to negative racialized stereotypes. For example, Latino men as uniformly sexist and macho (Peña 1991; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Messner 1994; Mirandé 1997; Schaeffer-Grabiel 2004), Asian men as docile and weak (Chen 1999; Nemoto 2008), emotionally distant and uncommunicative and also domineering in relations with women (Pyke and Johnson 2003; Kim and Pyke 2015). These dynamics

explain how the ideal notion of white Western masculinity thrives on the subordination of other masculinities, leading to negative perceptions of coethnic men, and enhancing the attractiveness of white men among non-Western women (Morgan 2015).

Although some scholars argue that the monolithic conceptions of non-white/non-Western masculinities (e.g., Mexican/Latino masculinities) as stereotypically hyper-masculine are often a class-based phenomenon (Baca-Zinn 1982; Peña 1991; Mirandé and et al. 2011), other scholars contend that the perpetual essentialist representations of race and/or ethnicity still dominate social class in the context of countries with high rates of immigration, like the U.S. (Omi and Winant 1986; Feagin 1991). Research findings suggest that the perpetual essentialist representations of white masculinity often trump other identity markers (e.g., socioeconomic status, education, or country of origin) in transnational contexts and favor "first-world, heterosexual, white males" (Pessar and Mahler 2003; Kim 2006). People tend to overlook variation within racial categories. For example, in Asian countries, white Western men are often imagined as "charismatic," "modern," "cosmopolitan," "faithful," and "gender-egalitarian" regardless of their actual class status (Lan 2011; Maher and Lafferty 2014; Thompson et al. 2016). Having a white Western husband may be translated into potentially having a pale white skin child, which is considered a marker of high status and beauty in many Asian countries, while dark skin is associated with poverty, outdoor work, or rural and agrarian background (Mills 1997; Bao 2009). Asian women may perceive Western men as capable of providing wealth and opportunities to pursue an affluent lifestyle due to the income disparity between the richer and poorer countries (Stanley 2011). Also, Asian women and men may perceive

white Western men as stronger and more powerful than Asian men because of the impressions they had about history of European colonization and U.S. domination over Asia, and chivalrous images of U.S. military men stationed in Asian countries during wartimes (Nagel 2000; Kim 2006). The idealization of whiteness coincides with the effects of living in a Western society where the enhanced power and privileges associated with white Westerners produce the higher status valuation among those who migrate to Western countries (Chow 2000).

In this chapter, I use the concept of hegemonic masculinity to examine how women from non-Western countries, like Thailand, relationally construct or reconstruct notions of hegemonic masculinity in their descriptions of white and coethnic men as they relate to their spousal preferences and choices.

Internalized Racial Oppression in Spousal Preferences

Internalized racial oppression occurs when members of subordinated or marginalized groups believe in the negative societal stereotypes, values, and identities about one's racial/ethnic group, resulting in group members loathing themselves and disliking others in their group without realizing that those beliefs are that are produced by the white dominant group (Jones 2000; Speight 2007; Pyke 2010b; Varela 2014). The internalized racial oppression has been described as both psychological and sociological processes that systematically reproduce inequalities between non-white and white racial groups in the white-dominated society (Varela 2014). In the global context, internalized racial oppression manifests as non-white, non-Western groups embracing white Euro/American values, norms, and ideas and believe that following such values and

norms is the best way in doing things. The internalized racial oppression shapes the ways non-Western groups think and make decisions in romantic involvements and spousal preferences, often without realizing them. For example, some Latina women choose not to date nor marry Latino men because they believe in the negative stereotypes about Latino men as unfaithful (Padilla 2001), or some Japanese women refuse to marry coethnic men due to their perceived negative image of Japanese men as uniformly authoritarian and immature (Kelsky 2001; Hirakawa 2004). Despite the fact that most people marry within one's own racial/ethnic group, several studies find that some non-Western women, both single and married, think white Western men are more caring, gender-egalitarian, responsible and make better husbands than coethnic men (Constable 2003; Kim 2006; Esara 2006; Tosakul 2010; Pyke 2010a).

Asian women and men are constructed differently in the dominant heteronormative discourse. Therefore, their chances of romantically partnering or marrying someone of different race are not the same. Asian women are portrayed as hyper-feminine and submissive, hence making them desirable in global marriage market (Constable 2003). Asian men, on the other hand, are constructed in relation to white Western men as lacking masculine traits and less attractive. Negative stereotypes of Asian men play an important role in shaping dating and spousal preferences among Asian-American women (Lee 2004; Nemoto 2009), and among women from Asian countries, who regard coethnic men as less undesirable partners than white men (Constable 2003; Esara 2009; Williams 2010). When giving reasons not to date or marry coethnic Asian men, some Asian women often cite the hegemonic white masculinity and

describe white men and coethnic men as essential opposites, for example describing white men as more caring and supportive, while Asian men as self-centered and domineering in heterosexual relationships with women (Chow 2000; Pyke and Johnson 2003). In doing so, they largely overlook variation within racial categories.

These internalized racial and gender presumptions about white and coethnic men among non-Western groups are parts of what Said (1978) called "Orientalism," which is a worldview produced by Europeans for centuries to promote essentialist differences between the West and the East, hence situating the West as a superior culture (Kim 2011). The Orientalism discourse, which serves political, economic, and imperial interests of the West, has shaped the views of non-Western groups through various mechanisms over time (e.g., military conquest, economic expansions, and cultural influences) to the extent that the Western-constructed narratives about the non-Western groups become realities that non-Western people believe. Given these Western domination and the internalization of "colonized mentality" (Fanon 1961), some non-Western people might view Western whiteness as an "object of desire," seeing them as the norm and hope to identify closer to them (Nemoto 2009). Thus, partnering with a white Western person might be a form of cultural capital that helps them achieve such a norm. When non-Western groups regard Western whiteness as the norm, it means they believe in the white supremacist discourse that cast their own culture as inferior. This form of internalized racial oppression goes undetected in the social lives of non-Western groups and informs their spousal preferences. My analysis of the Thai wives' narrative

accounts about Thai men and white Western men will consider the effects of this domination.

Drawing on this literature, I ask the question: in what ways might the notions of hegemonic masculinity associated with white Western men and internalized racial oppression shape the way Thai wives think about white and Thai men as potential romantic partners and spouses? Do they make racial assumptions in their descriptions of white and coethnic men as they relate to their spousal preferences and choices, and if so, can we detect the internalized form of racial oppression directed at Thai men in their descriptions about their preferences for spouses?

Data and Method

This study consists of interviews with 38 Thai wives of white U.S. men. I located them from a mix of purposive sampling and snowball sampling method from multiple sites (e.g., personal contacts, two Thai Buddhist temples, and online) (for more details about sample selection and rationale, see Chapter 2). I employed a 4-page-interview guide with open-ended questions and follow-up probes to ask about respondents' personal backgrounds; dating experiences; what attracted them to their current husband (and former husband(s) and boyfriend(s) where relevant); ideas about Thai women dating or marrying white Western men as they grew up; how they met their husbands; and ideas they had about U.S. society. The analysis in this particular chapter focused primarily on respondents' descriptions of white and coethnic men as they relate to their spousal preferences and choices.

The interviews elicited detailed descriptions of the respondents' dating experiences with Thai men and white Western men so as to uncover respondents' racial assumptions in their romantic relationships. I asked the respondents about, in their dating experiences, what they like and dislike about Thai men, white Western men, and their husbands. What attracted them to their current husband, and former husband(s) and boyfriend(s), where relevant? What make them marry their current husband? I also asked them what kinds of men they would marry if they were single again.

In the process of analysis, I transcribed the interviews in Thai. I employed a constant comparative method (Glaser 1965) to code interview data into more nuanced categories and compared respondents' descriptions within and across the respondents' social class backgrounds. I read through all the transcripts of the completed interviews, identified and organized the key concepts and recurring themes in Thai, using codes, when analyzing the data. I also analyzed coded interviews and respondents' demographic data to identify similarities and differences within and across subsamples. I focused on the types of racial assumptions about men. For example, when the respondents stated that "white men are unlike Thai men, they are more helpful," or "Thai men are unfaithful," I grouped respondents who stated similar assumptions together using codes and identified what characteristics or life histories that the respondents had in common. For example, whether the respondents had negative dating experiences with Thai or white Western men prior to their current marriage. By doing this, I can uncover how previous relationships inform the respondents' current marriage with white U.S. men. Also, I looked for similarities and differences across the three subsamples (for example, whether the

respondents had economic hardships prior to their current marriage). Comparison across groups allow me to identify how different class backgrounds shape the ideas that Thai wives have about white U.S. men. I later translated coded interviews to English for those relevant portions used in the presenting the data in this study. In the findings, I present quotes from the respondents that reflect the patterns of how Thai and white men are stereotyped, and analyze them. I identify respondents with pseudonyms.

Findings

Among respondents who invoked racial stereotypes in their descriptions of dating experiences and marital relationships with Thai and white men, I identified three major patterns in their construction of masculinities. These included: 1) the preconceived admiration of white masculinity; 2) the racialization of positive experiences with "whiteness," while racializing negative experiences with Thai men in their co-construction of white and Thai masculinities; and 3) the ways respondents treated bad experiences with white men as individual flaws without generalizing negative traits to all white men. The findings provided evidence that hegemonic masculinity benefits white Western men by shaping the respondents' spousal preferences in ways that deemed Thai coethnic men as undesirable romantic partners.

The Preconceived Admiration of White Western Masculinity

Almost one-third of respondents (11 of 38) indicated preferences for white spouses before they met their current husbands. Many claimed that white Western men were more attractive than Thai men. Although the respondents who indicated preferences for white husband varied by social class backgrounds, they expressed admiration for

white Western masculinity in similar ways. Some respondents linked whiteness to physical attractiveness. For example, Jenny, a 45-year-old Thai wife who grew up in a beach city that catered to many Western tourists. Growing up, she recalled admiring white Western masculinity. She said that white men "had pretty faces and were manly and tall, like Hollywood actors that she saw in the movies." These sentiments were shared by Mary, a 40-year-old Thai wife who worked part-time as a waitress at a hotel's restaurant in Thailand. When Mary was 18, she recalled her regular encounters with white Western guests:

> I remembered that most white male guests I met were handsome. Their
> facial features and skins looked really nice. They gave me big tips, so I
> assumed they were rich too, and they were polite.

Eleven respondents that indicated preferences for a white romantic partner uniformly expressed their desires for European facial features for their spouses and their future children. For most of them, skin tone was a significant feature of physical appearance they valued. Lighter skin tone was associated with a higher social status and greater attractiveness. This cultural value applied to both women and men. For example, some respondents stated that, "I like white men because I am dark," and "having a white husband possibly results in having a light-skinned, good-looking child." Bonnie, a 28-year-old wife who also had darker skin tone, further concluded:

> I like men who are tall and buff. I think even when they do not have a
> good-looking face, a muscular body can attract me. I don't mind dark-
> skinned men but if I were to choose between lighter skin tone and darker

one, I would go with the lighter one and the one who is taller and with a higher nose bridge so that when I have a baby, it would inherit those features.

Although respondents did not directly disparage Asian physical features (e.g., shortness, slanty eyes, or a flat nose), the regarded Eurocentric physical features as desired physical characteristics in their ideal romantic partners. These included fair skin, height, a muscular body type, and high nose bridges. These descriptions of the valued physical features were consistent with past research that Eurocentric standards continue to shape normative ideals of masculinity (Hesse-Swain 2006). As several studies have shown (Kelsky 2001; Constable 2003; Kim 2006), white Western physical features among non-Western women are constructed as superior and shaped expectations long before coming in contact with actual white men. Research on cosmetic surgery in Asia and the U.S. (Kaw 1993; Bao 2012) also showed that the popularity of double eyelid surgery and nose jobs among Asians was shaped by Eurocentric ideals. In this study I find that Thai wives associated desirable physical traits in men with Western whiteness.

Racializing Positive Experiences with "Whiteness"

The majority of respondents (27 of 38) stated that "whiteness" is not the main reason for choosing their husbands, by directly saying things like, "I didn't marry him because he is white." However, their accounts also revealed that they associated positive traits with white Western men. By comparison, respondents often associated negative qualities in their relationship with past Thai men. Here, some respondents cited the chivalrous character of white Western men. For example, Angel, a 35-year-old wife, said

that white men not only had facial features that are more attractive than Thai men, but they also had better manners. She provided an example of how white men opened the car door or the door at a store for women. She further commented, "Growing up, I didn't see Thai men doing this kind of things often."

More than one-third of respondents (14 of 38) constructed white masculinity as "respectful," "family-oriented," "liberating," and "gender egalitarian," and cast Thai men as typically "immature," "irresponsible," "flirtatious," and "unfaithful." Most respondents attributed these differences to stronger patriarchal values and commented that white men allow women greater gender freedom and gender equality. Common responses included: "White men treat women better than Thai men," "white men are family man," or "white men do housework, but Thai men don't." These perceptions about cultural differences were then generalized as racial differences between Thai and white men.

For example, Suda, a 41-year-old engineer whose husband is twenty-one years her senior, reiterated that gender egalitarian attitudes were exclusively associated with white Western masculinity. She stated:

> From what I have seen from my husband and his friends. I think white men treat women better [than Thai men]. They have the mindset about women's rights. For example, when I'm in a group meeting or group conversation, they respect my opinion. They wouldn't shut me out just because I am a woman and I think they do not care much about seniority. They don't ignore your opinion just because you are younger. If it was in Thailand, I wouldn't have a say [if the group members are much older].

When my husband and I decided to renovate the house, he asked for my opinion too. We did it together. He picked materials, I picked colors. He picked tiles, I picked carpet.

Moreover, half of respondents (19 of 38) perceived that their husbands were more helpful with housework than Thai men, even when some of them were solely responsible for household tasks on a daily basis. For example, Arunee, a 38-year-old housewife of a 49-year-old software analyst, compared her husband with her father about their contributions to household chores. She said:

White men are more respectful to women than Thai men. Women do not have to serve them because they can take care of themselves. When they need to do laundry, they will do it by themselves. Each of the partners does their own personal cleaning. This is what I saw from my husband and my father-in-law. White men do not demand women to do something for them. They are more responsible (than Thai men). I still see my father have my mother do all cleaning for him, washing his underwear.

In another example, Em, a 50-year-old housewife who divorced her Thai military husband before getting married to a 62-year-old biologist, juxtaposed her domineering Thai ex-husband with her current husband who was more helpful with housework. She said:

Before we were married, we went to dinner at our friend's place, and my husband always helped with serving, cooking, and washing dishes. This is a good thing about white men that I see from all my friends' husbands who

are (white) Australians and Europeans. They all help their wives with housework. Unlike when I was with my ex-husband, I worked full-time as a teacher and had a family business, but he still expected me to perform household chores. For him, women needed to be subservient. He would not do anything for women. I had to do laundry, cleaning, and taking care of our child. My ex-husband liked to invite his friends to drink and eat at home, but it was my job to prepare food, wash dishes, and clean after. They never helped. I could not express any opinions because he thought he was the king of the house. If I spoke my mind, he would scold me and be rude to me. He would embarrass me in front of his friends. Unlike my current husband, he always asks me if it is okay to invite someone to have dinner at home. He also helps with everything from washing dishes, cooking, vacuuming, and cleaning windows. **I cannot say for all American men**, **but from what I have seen, all white husbands I know help their wives with housework**. More than ten families that I know are like these. (emphasis added)

Em emphasized her admiration of white men being caring and helpful even when these perceptions were merely based on limited experiences with few of her friends' husbands. She still used their race as an important explanation of why her ex-Thai husband and his Thai friends never helped her clean after meal. This generalization of a few white husbands to the entire group of white men illustrated the racial biases that were informed by the hegemonic status of white Western masculinity.

Besides admiring white husbands, some Thai wives used the racialized images of white masculinity as a reference for Thai husbands who do not fit the racialized stereotype of Thai masculinity. For example, when asked to describe Thai husbands she knew in the U.S., Ploy, a 40-year-old nurse, stated:

Fortunately, most of my close [Thai] friends [in the U.S.] who have Thai husbands…**Their husbands have some characteristics like white men**. [Interviewer: What do you mean "characteristics like white men"?] Being helpful. For example, like when the wife needs to be away from home, the husband must be able to call off work and take care of the child. Thai men normally do not do housework, but white husbands regularly do it. That's why I say some of my close friends' husbands [who are Thai] are exceptions because they are helpful (emphasis added).

When Ploy linked Thai husbands who helped their wives do household chores with white men, racialized positive masculine traits were still linked with whiteness and not with Thai masculinity. She overlooked that many white men did not fit this ideal. Some respondents also overlooked that there were white husbands who did not help their wives and there were other variations among white men such as social class, ages, and number of previous marriages, which might be the real reasons for them being more gender egalitarian and caring than other men. For instance, I found that among respondents who perceived that their husbands were more helpful with housework than Thai men, eight women and twelve of their husbands had been married more than once. It is possible that both women and men may have used their past experiences in their

previous marriage to negotiate new gender arrangements in their current marriage by adopting more gender egalitarian attitudes after having experienced disappointment in the previous relationships (Pyke and Adams 2010). However, the respondents perceived "whiteness" as the key characteristic that made for a good husband. These accounts revealed the belief that race essentially determined men's characteristics.

Racializing Negative Experiences with Thai Men

Nearly half of respondents (17 of 38) stated that they had no interest in having a relationship or marrying Thai men. These preferences were based on their own negative experiences with a Thai boyfriend or ex-husband, or the experiences of someone they knew. More than half of respondents (24 of 38) cast Thai men as typically "immature," "irresponsible," "flirtatious," or "unfaithful," regardless of class background. For example, Minnie, a 45-year-old housewife of a 43-year-old engineer, recalled her relationship with a Thai man as she stated:

> He was a son of my mom's friend, a military man who is two years my senior. He was attracted to me, so he asked his mom to talk to my mom. I went out with him, but I didn't like him. [Interviewer: Why didn't you like him?] Drinking habits. . .that's what I didn't like about Thai men. Let's say typical Thai men are not a kind of family man, not respectful, and always prioritize friends first. His mom already bought an engagement ring, but I fled to study in the U.S.

Minnie generalized negative traits such as heavy drinking and prioritizing male friends as character flaw that apply to all Thai men even though they had nothing to do

with race or ethnicity. Similarly, May, a 32-year-old housewife who dated Thai men in college, recalled some negative traits that she associated with Thai men, as she stated:

> Thai men were players. I didn't see my future with them. So, I cut them out of my life. Thai men were raised to only think of themselves; they don't think about the future. They spend all money for personal pleasures like travelling and drinking. More importantly, they spend money to treat other girls…They always check pretty women out; they won't stop even when they have a family. I had enough of Thai men. So, I started looking to date white men. [Interviewer: Why white men?] Because I think they are better. I think they love family; they are not flirtatious.

Of the 24 women who generalized negative traits to Thai men, fourteen specifically described Thai men as less faithful than white Western men, although only eight respondents had firsthand experience with an ex-husband or ex-boyfriend who had an affair with another woman. The remaining six invoked infidelity as stereotypes of Thai without having had direct experience. Although there is a cultural belief that Thai wives tolerate their Thai husbands having extra-marital sexual relationships with other women (Bao 2008), infidelity was racialized as a Thai trait compared to white men, rather than being regarded as a trait common to all men. Six respondents said that "unlike Thai men, white men rarely have extra-marital sex." However, these beliefs contrast with the empirical evidence that 20 to 30 percent of U.S. men also engaged in extramarital sexual relationship, with no significant differences across race and ethnicity (Wiederman 1997; Atkins et al. 2001). The numbers of married U.S. men who engaged in extramarital

relationships did not significantly differ from Thai men (Dumronggittigule et al. 1995; Bao 2008). Respondents also dismissed competing perspectives that not all Thai men engaged in nor accepted extra-marital affairs as a cultural norm.

For instance, Kob, a 42-year-old computer engineer, made the comparison between Thai playboys and white U.S. family men, while contemplating about how her life would have been different if she did not come to the U.S. 20 years ago, and was still with her ex-Thai boyfriend. As Kob stated:

> Thai men might not be a good choice for marriage. I wanted a Thai boyfriend, but part of me was afraid that the relationship would not last. Thai men are known for being womanizers. It doesn't matter how good, beautiful, or wealthy you are, they will still find the way to cheat on you. A cousin of mine is pretty and graduated from a university abroad, but her [Thai] husband still has a minor wife. Older Thai men tend to have mistresses. My uncle has one too. I also heard about friends in Thailand who got married for five or six years and began having marital problems or thinking about divorce. White men do not cheat as much as Thai men because it is unacceptable here.

The respondents generalized bad experiences associated patterns of infidelity with Thai men, while conversely suggesting that white men did not display these traits. In this case, Kob overly drew upon differences between Thai and white men, despite the data that show rather high rates of extra marital affairs in the U.S. Even though there is a basis

for Thai women's belief that these behaviors are common among Thai men, they turned to white men as the opposites.

Two respondents associated Thai masculinity with physical abuse and domestic violence. For example, Rose, a 30-year-old wife, recalled that her father would often hit her mother. For this reason, she never considered marrying Thai men and only looked for white Western men on the Internet. As Rose stated:

> Once I turned nineteen I left my rural home to work in a beauty salon in the city. That was my turning point. I met an older colleague who taught me how to find a foreign boyfriend (via the Internet). She had a Thai boyfriend who abused her, so she ran away from him and later found a white boyfriend online. She introduced me to online dating with white men because she did not want me to suffer the same fate as she did. I could relate to her very well because I came from a not-so-good family. My dad was always drunk. I grew up seeing dad hitting mom all the times. I remembered she always got bruises and black eyes. I did not want to talk bad about my family, but I want you to get the idea where I came from and why I don't want a Thai husband. Today, I am still grateful to that colleague as she taught me how to find white men online.

Rin, a 40-year-old wife, shared a similar narrative about her experiences with her brothers-in-law. Her parents passed away when she was fourteen, and her older sister took care of her after that. She described two of her brothers-in-law as "wife beaters." As Rin stated:

I had seen from each of my brothers-in-law that when they were drunk, they hit my sisters. So, I didn't want Thai husbands. I was afraid. **I don't mean to say that all Thai men are like them, but they are my experience [with Thai men]**. They kicked my sisters, and it's not just in the past, they still do that to my youngest sister (emphasis added).

Even when Rin mentioned that she did not mean to say that it was true for all Thai men, she still drew upon these stereotypes to justify her rationale for never wanting to marry Thai men. Rin perceived that all Thai men were potentially violent and abusive, much like her brothers-in-law, and regardless of other important factors such as their education, socioeconomic status, ages, or growing up with domestic violence (Abramsky et al 2011). For Rin, "being Thai' alone was enough reason for not choosing Thai men as romantic partners. Conversely, Rin constructed white Western men as a "white knight in shining armor" who would rescue her from an abusive relationship. Rose and Rin did not generalize physical abuse as prevalent social problem in American households. In fact, nearly one-third of women in the U.S. have experienced physical violence by a male intimate partner at some point in their lifetime (Black et al. 2011). There are many white U.S. men who are perpetrators (Caetano et al. 2000, 2008). Rates of male to female intimate partner violence in European countries also remain as high as 25 to 30 percent (World Health Organization 2013). These high rates of domestic abuse and violence in Western countries were overlooked, and several respondents also overlooked accounts of abuse with white men from peers.

While most respondents who associated negative traits with Thai men and positive traits of white men, there was one case where a respondent generalized her negative experiences to all Asian men. Noi, a 40-year-old former salesperson who dated men from many different racial and ethnic backgrounds, argued that gender oppression was common among all Asian men, as she recounted:

> I had a Thai partner, but I earned more money than him, so I asked him to do the housework as we cohabited. He did the housework, but his parents were not happy once they knew that their son was washing my underwear. Living with a Thai man, it was like you marry the whole family not just the guy, and I felt his family didn't like me. So, I broke up with him and dated only foreigners. Because my job was to take care of foreign clients, I got to know many of them. I dated men from Hong Kong, Korea, and Japan, **but they were not okay because they were still Asians** [Interviewer*:* what about being Asian?] **They were controlling and possessive**. They would not be happy if I went out partying at night. They would want an obedient girlfriend. I was going to need their approval first before doing anything. But for my (white) husband, I don't have to ask for permissions. For example, I had my friend, a gay man, visiting me from Thailand; I told my husband that I would take this friend to [a casino resort] and stay in the same hotel room, and that's it. My husband is very understanding. He respects my decisions. He is not going to tell me what I

can or can't do. Asian boyfriends are going to ask tons of questions. So, I

dated only white men and problems are solved (emphasis added).

Noi's responses suggested that patriarchal attitudes were problematic among Asian men and not just Thai men. The impression that "all Asian men" were controlling and possessive in romantic relationships suggested that these negative traits were embedded exclusively in "Asian" masculinity. The term "Asian men," used by Noi was a meaningful word choice, in that it came from a woman in Thailand where there was more emphasis in distinguishing between different Asian nationalities than that occurred in the U.S. It implied that, for Noi, Asian men were uniformly and rigidly controlling in her accounts regardless of their nationality and ethnicity.

By attributing undesirable behaviors of coethnic men, or Asian men, to the entire group, some respondents engaged in the "racialization of bad experiences" (Chow 2000; Morgan 2015). That is, rather than attributing such negative experiences to all men, respondents attributed it to a "pan-racial problem" (Pyke 2010a). However, these negative traits (e.g., being unfaithful, abusive, and controlling) were not transferable to white men, who were glorified unlike Thai men. Respondents excluded white men from this generalization, which illustrated the powerful influence of hegemonic masculinity which associates white men with only positive traits, even when such positive stereotypes are not true.

Individualizing Negative Experiences with White Men

There was a double standard among some respondents who previously had bad relationships with both Thai men and white Western men before marriage. They

racialized their bad experiences with Thai men but attributed bad experiences with white men to individual flaws, not their culture nor race. Nor did the respondents generalize the actions of their previous partners to all men. For example, May, a 32-year-old Thai wife, had dated and broke up with Thai men in college, saying that they were flirtatious and that she would never considered Thai men as romantic partners again. She later dated a white British man she found online. The man later visited her in Thailand for a few months. Not long after he went back, he told her that he wanted to end the relationship because he got another woman pregnant. However, his action did not stop May from looking specifically for other white men online, as she recalled:

> When the [white] British guy dumped me, I thought that I was unlucky in love, but a month later I met a white U.S. military man online, and he later becomes my husband. At that time, we both were heart-broken. He was cheated on by a Filipina bargirl he met when he was stationed in [an Asian country]. He gave her money every month, not knowing that she already had a husband. We both were cheated on, so we could relate to each other. He visited me in Thailand after two months and asked me to marry him. It was a quick decision, but I followed to marry him [in Asian country] and now we live in the U.S.

May expressed a strong dislike for her Thai ex-boyfriends who were flirtatious, using their behaviors as the reason for not dating any Thai men. However, she did not generalize the bad behavior of her ex-white British boyfriend, who broke up with her for another woman, to all white men. She still searched for white men online and met her

current husband. For May, there were white men who were faithful and unfaithful, but Thai men were all unfaithful. I asked her how she could be sure that her husband would not treat her like her British boyfriend did. May replied that she could not possibly know but she was at least sure that her husband would be more trustworthy than Thai men. She claimed that "One out of ten white men might be unfaithful, but ten out of ten Thai men would be flirtatious and unfaithful."

In a similar fashion, Sarika, a 50-year-old wife who had divorced twice with Thai and white U.S. men, described her first Thai ex-husband who was 10 years her senior as domineering and flirtatious. She married her first husband when she was 17 years old. He was a high school teacher and had affairs with several women, including his former students. Sarika racialized all Thai men as essentially unfaithful by saying "Thai men could not keep their pants in place and it was impossible to keep an eye on them twenty-four seven." She divorced him when she was 21 years old and shunned all romantic relationships with Thai men. As she stated,

> Once I divorced my first husband I was still young, many Thai men tried
>
> to court me, but I sent them all away because I did not trust Thai men for
>
> their flirtatiousness.

Sarika later married a 36-year-old white U.S. army doctor whom she met while she was a local government officer in Thailand. He came with the U.S. army to provide medical services to Thais in rural areas. She described how she was attracted to him, saying that she hit on him first because he was a medical doctor and handsome. She also

believed that, unlike Thai men, white men did not look down on women who made romantic advances towards men.

It was clear from Sarika's narrative accounts that while she rejected all Thai men for their perceived flirtatiousness and unfaithfulness, she did not shun an opportunity to develop a romantic relationship with a white man. Sarika and her second ex-husband moved to the U.S. and spent a few years there before moving to live in a U.S. military housing in the Philippines in the late 1980's. She later got divorced after four years of marriage. Sarika explained, "He got bored with me and found a new woman in the Philippines. So, he asked me to divorce him." However, Sarika did not generalize her second ex-husband's unfaithfulness to all white U.S. men, unlike the way she did to all Thai men. Nor did she generalize this to all men. She later met and married her current husband who was in the U.S. navy in the Philippines and is four years younger than her. She said:

> My current husband is not rich, unlike my second husband, but he is a faithful and diligent man. He is a gentleman and very polite. For the past 24 years that we have been together, he never made me worry about other women even when he was away several months due to his job. He quit the navy 10 years ago and got a job in a technology company. Now he becomes a salary man who comes home on time from work every day.

Sarika treated her second ex-husband and her current husband as unique individuals. She said that while her second ex-husband was unfaithful and found another woman, her current husband is not the same. She allowed white U.S. men to vary in their

personalities and traits, while casting all Thai men as uniformly and rigidly unfaithful. Although I did not find these dynamics from other respondents interviewed, these two examples suggested that some Thai wives constructed white men as natural and normal, while perceiving Thai men as problematic, aberrant, or inferior to white men. These dynamics illustrated the racial bias directed only at Thai men. Both respondents discussed viewed Thai men as inextricably bound to the racial stereotypes that denigrate them, but they did not apply the same view to white men. As Frankenburg (1993) argued, whiteness is constructed as a "unnamed and unmarked" racial category to ensure continued privilege for whites. When the race of the men who were unfaithful in previous relationships is dismissed when they were white, the hegemony of white masculinity is reinforced in the global marriage market. I found that white men were not subjected to racial stereotypes by Thai women, which illustrated an internalized form of racial oppression directed at Thai men, rendering them as less desirable than white men.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I examined how Thai wives of U.S. men drew on the co-constructions of Thai and white Western masculinities and utilized them in explaining their marriage to white U.S. men. The findings illustrated that some Thai wives of U.S. men internalized positive views about white Western masculinity long before they met their husbands. Some Thai wives indicated their racial preferences for white spouses by saying that white men were more attractive and were more masculine (e.g., taller and more buff) than Thai men. These preconceived notions among Thai wives reflected the Orientalist view that dichotomized the West as allegedly superior to the East.

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Moreover, in their constructions of Thai and Western masculinities, respondents associated positive traits with white Western men and negative traits with Thai men. By constructing white men as chivalrous, gender-egalitarian, caring, and helpful, the Thai wives of U.S. men constructed Thai men as the opposites of these positive traits, casting them as domineering, lazy, and uncaring. In doing so, white masculinity secures its hegemonic status through the idealization of white men and denigration of Thai masculinity. More than half of respondents engaged in the "racialization of bad experiences" (Chow 2000; Morgan 2015) by critiquing bad behaviors done by few Thai men and generalizing such negative experiences to all coethnic men, rather than attributing them to all men. Although several Thai wives said that Thai men's unfaithfulness and flirtatiousness came from a predominant cultural belief in Thailand that tolerates men who had extra-marital affairs, these negative traits were racialized as uniquely Thai rather than a "pan-racial problem" (Pyke 2010a). The respondents also overlooked that there was variation within the Thai group, not all Thai men engaged or accepted infidelity.

There were two cases in which the respondents had romantic relationships that ended badly with both Thai and white Western men. However, respondents only generalized bad experiences with Thai men, using these experiences as the reason not to date all Thai men. These same generalizations did not apply to white partners. White privilege played an important role in shaping the ways respondents dismissed "race" in their negative experiences with white men. Even when respondents did not glorify white masculinity, white men were not subjected to racial stereotypes, nor blamed because of

their race when relationships ended badly. Similarly, when the mass shooting perpetrator is identified as anything other than white, race becomes the center of attention in media and public discourse. However, when the perpetrator is white, race is dismissed as a relevant factor (Mingus and Zopf 2010; Chuang 2012). This is one of the racial privileges that white men received from hegemonic masculinity and globalized narratives of white men's alleged superiority within the global marriage market.

In this chapter, I showed examples of how hegemonic white masculinity operates to shape the ways in which Thai wives internalized positive images of white men as desirable partners. These examples offered a different perspective from previous scholarly works that argued international romance with white Western men as a form of resistance to ethnically-based forms of patriarchy. I argued otherwise – that such assumptions reflect and reinforce the dominance of white masculinity and denigration of non-white, non-Western masculinities. Future research on cross-racial international romance needs to consider that resistance and complicity can be interrelated processes (Pyke and Dang 2003) that co-occur in the systems of oppression.

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Chapter 4:

Being a "*Mia Farang*": (Mis)Representations of Thai Wives of White U.S. Men and the Contexts in Which They Occur

Chapter Summary

Drawing on interviews with thirty-eight Thai immigrant wives between the ages of twenty-eight and fifty, this chapter illustrates how Thai wives of white U.S. men described common stereotypes and assumptions placed upon them in the U.S. and in Thailand. I employed the intersectionality framework to analyze how mutually constitutive connections between class, race, gender shaped their experiences differently across transnational arenas. In the U.S., Thai wives from all educational and occupational backgrounds encountered racial and gender stereotype when interacting with Americans. For example, the friends and families of husbands often assumed that they utilized marriage for material gains (e.g., legal U.S. status or economic security). This was especially the case if the wives did not work outside of the home. Thai wives were also stereotyped as good cooks or housekeepers. In Thailand, they were often mistaken for sex workers when accompanying their husbands to public places, including the beach, hotels, or restaurants. Thai wives were also perceived by their natal families to be well-off in the U.S. because they had white U.S. husbands. This assumption sometimes posed challenges for some wives who were either unemployed or low-wage workers in the U.S.

Introduction

Due to the abolition of anti-miscegenation laws in 1967 and other significant cultural changes (e.g., greater racial tolerance), cross-racial heterosexual marriages have become more common in U.S. (Qian and Lichter 2011). Despite these structural and cultural changes, foreign-born wives of white men in the U.S. continue to face derogatory stereotypes either as opportunist global gold-diggers or as coming from "backward" countries (Zare and Mendoza 2011). Early scholarship on Asian immigration documented the intermarriage between U.S. military men and former prostitutes following U.S. military interventions in Asian countries in the mid-twentieth century, and thus consequently, foreign-Asian brides are often portrayed in popular discourses as global prostitutes, regardless of their actual status and occupation (Hirata 1982; Espiritu 2008; Firstenberg 2011). Despite criticisms of these portrayals, U.S. immigration laws and discourse continue to rely on these narratives to explain and disparage these women's motivation for marriage as simple exchanges of emotional and sexual labor for economic gains (So 2006). Given the stereotypes of the "mail-order bride" (MOB)—a disputed term referring to women who used international marriage brokers to find a husband abroad by putting their image and contact information in catalogs or on websites—as either victims or opportunists, perceived images of non-white/non-Western foreign wives are distorted and denigrated in political debates, news articles and academic discourses (Kim 2010; Firstenberg 2011).

Intersectional feminist studies recognize diversity in women's experiences (Collins 2000; Yuval-Davis 2006). Women's experiences are shaped not only by their

gender, but also by many other forms of social structures, such as race, ethnicity and social class. For example, the experience of ethnically Thai-Isan women who grew up poor in rural Thailand differs from the experience of highly educated and professional Chinese-Thai women from urban Bangkok. Womanhood is not a one-dimensional status but shaped by several social and cultural milieus that inform the ways in which women construct and navigate their reality (Seccombe 1998). However, there are some shared patterns that Thai immigrant wives experience upon moving to the U.S. First, they live in a male-dominant society that support and maintain gender inequality through various institutions and societal norms. They have been shaped by heteronormative gender ideologies to view marriage and motherhood as the pillars of femininity (Yuh 2002). Moreover, they are non-white minority who live in a society where racial and cultural ideologies support white dominance.

In this chapter, I examined the ways in which Thai immigrant women of white U.S. men were racialized and exposed to stereotypes in their everyday life. I focused on the stereotypical images of "*mia farang*," or Thai wives of white Western men. as the respondents described their daily social interactions with other people in the U.S. and in Thailand when they were visiting home. The purpose of this chapter is to explore what the stereotypes about Thai wives of white men were. I also examined how stereotypes placed upon them were linked to interlocking systems of oppression (such as racism, sexism, and class oppression). The findings in this chapter provided the basis for the strategies that respondents employed to cope with these stereotypes about which I will explore in Chapter 5.

In the next section, I present relevant theoretical framework on intersecting systems of oppression that impact lives of Thai women in cross-racial international marriages. First, I provide an overview of the intersectionality framework in migration studies. I then discuss the stereotypes associated with foreign women in cross-racial international marriages. Lastly, I discuss the local construction of "*mia farang*."

Intersectionality at the Transnational Level

Intersectionality is a theoretical framework to understand multidimensional relations organized around race, gender, class, and other socially constructed categories (McCall 2005). It is one of the most important theoretical and methodological contributions in sociology that arose in the late 1980s and early 1990s from critical race and feminist studies. Crenshaw (1991) is credited for introducing the intersectional framework when she analyzed the experiences of black and Latina women in battered women's shelters. She found that women experienced forms of domination that arose from interlocking factors of sexism, racism, poverty, unemployment, and child care responsibility. For example, if these women were white, they would not face racial discrimination in employment and could have afforded to live elsewhere (Golash-Baza 2016). Collins (2000), a notable intersectionality scholar, describes intersectionality as the "matrix of domination" that creates interlocking systems of discrimination and disadvantage which cannot be considered as a single, monolithic social phenomenon. And thus, the experiences of women of color cannot be understood fully by looking at the race or gender separately. She critiques analytical approaches that treat gender, race, and class as separate characteristics attached to individuals because the intersecting

oppressions are mutually constituted. Rather, Collins argues that all individuals hold varying amounts of penalty and privilege in one historically created system (e.g., being both oppressed and oppressor simultaneously). For example, U.S. white women are penalized by their gender but privileged by their race and citizenship status. In the U.S., non-Western/non-white immigrant wives are penalized by their race, gender, and immigrant status. Some of them may benefit from class privilege while facing gender and racial discrimination (Nash 2008). An intersectionality framework allows closer examination of complex social realities which shapes individuals' identities than does studying of a single social category in isolation from other categories (Purkayastha 2010). Thus, people's experiences need to be understood in the context that these socially constructed categories have simultaneous and interacting effects.

Recent migration and race scholars adopt the intersectionality framework to understand privilege and subordination of immigrants as they move across national borders (Pessar and Mahler 2003; Radhakishnan 2008; Purkayastha 2010). They argue that the intersection of class, race, gender, and other socially constructed categories, such as religion and nation of origin, shape immigrants' experiences differently across local, regional, national, and transnational contexts. For example, working-class Vietnamese American men struggle economically and live in relative poverty in the U.S. so that they can save up money to spend extravagantly in their home country (Thai 2008). Although they are marginalized as racial minorities in the U.S., they acquire a certain class privilege and they are able to live up their masculine ideals when they travel to their home country, partly, because of the high-income disparity between the U.S. and

Vietnam. On the other hand, middle-class, highly educated, professional South Asian immigrants, who have class privilege both in the U.S. and in their home countries, are penalized by their race and ethnic status when travelling across countries due to the racially biased surveillance and racial profiling at the international level (Purkayastha 2010). Although the mutually constitutive connections of class, race, gender and other socially constructed categories are salient all the time, the degree of their saliency varies at different contexts and shape individuals' experiences differently across transnational spaces and times (Yuval-Davis 2006; Nash 2008; Anthias 2012).

Some transnational scholars incorporate the intersectionality framework to understand how transnational activities reconfigures gender and economic relations within transnational families. For example, transnational Mexican mothers can improve their family's life chances by working in the U.S. and remitting money home for their children's welfare in exchange with the pain of absence from them (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997). Stay-behind Vietnamese husbands had to negotiate their masculinity ideals as they took full responsibility of domestic work and child care because their wives migrated overseas for employment abroad (Hoang and Yeoh 2011). Other scholars show how advantages and disadvantages posed by women's backgrounds may change with time in response to evolving personal variables (e.g., language skills, education, and job experiences) or external constraints (e.g., state policies) (Riano 2011). Riano finds that Muslim immigrant women had difficulties in finding a paid-job in their trained professions despite their qualifications and language proficiency. To cope with this disadvantage, some women used their social and cultural capital to open their own

business (e.g., opening a travel agency specializing in travel to and from their countries of origin or working as a translator). Through an intersectional lens, privileges and subordination unfold as a set of processes rather than possessive characteristics of individuals since socially constructed categories are not equally salient at all times (Anthias 2012). That is to say, subordination might operate simultaneously with some kinds of privileges across different spaces and times. The intersectional framework offers a rich foundation to critically study how race/ethnicity, gender and class intersect to shape individuals' life chances across cultural arenas.

Stereotypes of Immigrants and Asian Brides in Cross-National Marriages

Stereotypes are commonly held false generalizations about the presumed characteristics of some persons or groups (Andersen 2006). Stereotypes about immigrants are usually determined by the unequal power between the host country and national origin of immigrants, especially when the immigrants come from a poorer country than the host country (Lee and Fiske 2006). Immigrants are often conflated with ethnic minorities, and the stereotypes of these two groups are simultaneously reproduced by the racially dominant groups in society. In the U.S., we frequently witness the incidents in which Americans invoke a racial stereotype by assuming that people of Hispanic/Latino background are "undocumented," regardless of their actual citizenship or resident status. For instance, in May 2018, a white male lawyer in New York threatened to call immigration enforcement authorities on the employees of a sandwich shop when he saw that they were speaking Spanish to one another and to Spanish-speaking customers (Roberts 2018). In another example, Asians who speak broken English or with a strong

accent are stereotyped as unassimilable foreigners or as "Fresh off the Boat" (Pyke and Dang 2003).

Stereotypes about immigrants are not only racialized, but also gendered. For Asian women, popular discourses tend to homogeneously represent them as "passive," "submissive," and "highly sexualized and willing to please men" (Mayuzumi 2008; Nemoto 2009; Zare and Mendoza 2011). These stereotypes are evident in the U.S. when a group of male students chanted a song with sexist and racist lyrics directed at Asian American women on their university's radio station (Patel 2008), or when Asian women were told by their non-Asian friends that they should be flattered by a racially fetishized comment that many non-Asian men prefer Asian women as romantic partners (Zheng 2016). In a study of sexual harassment, many Asian American women reported having experienced unwanted sexual advances from non-Asian men who often treated them as a fetish or misperceived them as highly sexualized (Chen 1997).

The stereotypes of Asian immigrant wives, in part, stem from the history of American military dominance and occupation in Asian countries such as Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand (Constable 2003; Nemoto 2009). The military connection put American men in contact with local women and encouraged a chance for marriage migration from these countries. The Western stereotype of Asian "military brides" has been constructed as "camp followers" or "war booties" who provide services such as laundry, nursing, companionship, and sex to soldiers during peace and war (Nagel 2000). The generally held stereotypes made about the Asian war brides were that these women marry to escape from poverty, or that they

were ex-prostitutes who worked near the U.S. military bases (Yuh 2002). These stereotypical images of Asian women remain salient in U.S. society (Chen 1997).

Stereotypes are powerful as they are widely shared and very resistant to change. However, they are often studied as individualized beliefs, rather than being deeply embedded in the social interactions and structures (Andersen 2006). Many sociological and social psychology studies have found that the cumulative nature of negative stereotypes, usually experienced from everyday microaggressions or subtle insults, shapes individuals' social realities and interactions with others. This is, especially true among racial minorities and women who experience stereotype threat, or the possibility of being judged or treated negatively on the basis of stereotypes made about them (Solorzano et al. 2000; Gorman 2005; Goff et al. 2008). For example, in his ethnography of black and Latino youths, Rios (2011) observed that black male youths had to maintain their distance from the candy bar aisle in a store and always held money in their hands, showing the store clerk that they were not attempting to steal anything, because they internalized that the clerk would have a preconceived assumption that they would steal something from the store. In another example, a Korean-American woman complies with normative gender arrangements (e.g., performing household duties) when in the presence of other Korean-American men because she assumed that they expected those acts from her (Pyke 2010). These examples demonstrate that stereotypes are structurally embedded in social interactions and institutions even though they manifested themselves as ideas that people have in their heads.

The Local Construction of "*Mia Farang*" in Thai Society

The Thai term "*mia farang*," which literally means a Thai wife of a white man, usually is a derogatory term in Thai usage. Many Thais conflate "*mia farang*" with "*mia chao*," (literally translated as "rental wife") which refers to Thai women who provide sexual and housekeeping services to international male tourists in exchange for money (Lapanun 2013). The popular usage of the term *mia farang* traced back to the Vietnam War when U.S. servicemen were stationed at seven U.S. air bases in major cities of Thailand (four bases were in the northeast, or Isan, and three were in Bangkok and Central Thailand) (Cohen 2003). The presence of approximately 140,000 U.S. military troops in Thailand boosted a wide range of nightlife entertainment, like bars and nightclubs as they usually spent their rest and recreation (R&R) at the service establishments surrounding their military bases (Sunanta 2009). The growth of the entertainment industry coincided with the urban migration of rural women and men particularly from Isan, which is the poorest region of Thailand, who were affected by the agricultural crisis in the 1970s and came seeking work in these military sites and other emerging tourist cities to accommodate the needs of U.S. military personnel, foreign workers and tourists, all of which was a precondition for significant international marriage migration two decades later (Brodeur et al 2017). Unlike South Korea and Japan where the active-duty U.S. military troops still exist today, the U.S. ceased to have significant official military bases within Thailand beginning in 1975 (Bialik 2007). Still, the rates of intermarriages among Thai women and white U.S. men are the highest of all Asian women in the U.S. (Ruggles et al. 2015). Although the patterns of intermarriage

between Thai women and American men have shifted from a military to a non-military basis, the stereotypes about them being "sexualized women willing to please men" still remain, especially when the global discourses recognize Thailand as the largest supplier of commercial sexual services (Brodeur et al 2017).

In commonly recited narratives, many U.S. servicemen and foreign male tourists paid Thai women to provide sexual and housekeeping services during their stay in Thailand, but the arrangements were also fulfilled by a degree of mutual emotional involvement (Cohen 2003). Some of these relationships led to marriage. It is important to note that white and non-white U.S. soldiers stationed in Thailand had relationships with local women. However; marriage between white American soldiers and local women constitute the majority of interracial marriage (Hidalgo and Bankston 2011). Also, not all Thai women who married foreign men met their husbands through this form of relationship. Thai women have worked in a variety of jobs that associate with U.S. soldiers, foreign tourists and workers, for example interpreters, secretaries in offices, cashiers at stores, receptionists at hotels, waitresses in restaurants, and so on. Still, Thai workers as sex workers has been the grand narrative that dominates the international imagination, popular media, and academic discourses for more than forty years (Sunanta 2009). For example, in an ethnographic study of Thai wives of white British men in the U.K., twelve of the forty respondents revealed to the author that they were former sex workers in Thailand (Charoensri 2010). It is inevitable that the term *mia farang* connotes the relationships that originated from Thailand's sex tourism even though Western men and Thai women can meet and fall in love in a context completely far from sex work, and

even far from Thailand. In a study of *mia farangs* in rural village in the northeast of Thailand, women marrying Western men were aware of the suspicion about their involvement in sex work even when it was not true of them (Lapanun 2013). However, there were parents, relatives, and residents in the village who contended that the social stigma attached to *mia farang* had been declining in recent years because the financial benefits that accrues to the families of women who have successful marriages also overshadows concerns parents have about the stigma of such marriages, while encouraging them to see such marriages as desirable (Tosakul 2010; Lapanun 2013).

Since the cross-racial international marriages between Thai women and white Western men in the past ten years have grown substantially in Isan or the northeast region of Thailand, a national discourse constructed by urban Central Thais outside the rural villages casts Isan wives of white Western men as "immoral women" who are "shamelessly pursuing foreign men for a quick and easy path to wealth" (Sunanta 2009:145). For Thais, the term "Isan" not only signifies a region of origin, but also an ethnicity. In the Isan region of Thailand, the majority of people are Lao descendants who migrated (and were relocated by force) into Thailand since the fourteenth century (Laungaramsri 2003). The Lao-speaking Thai citizens in the northeast identify themselves as "Isan" (northeastern) people or "Thai-Isan" to differentiate them from Lao people of Laos and from the Central Thais (Vaddhanaphuti 2005). Although Isan region became officially part of the modern Thai nation-state since 1904, the relationship between Central Thai and Isan region can be classified as a form of "internal colonialism," which is a geographically-based inequalities of a differentiated population

within a nation state (Pinderhughes 2011). The uneven development has promoted continuing trend in out-migration from Isan to bigger cities, mainly tourist destinations such as Bangkok, Pattaya, Hua Hin, Chiang Mai, and Phuket. This migration has created an ethnic division of labor in which Isan people represent the stereotypical rural migrants working as day laborers, household maids, taxi drivers, and sex workers in big cities of Thailand (Mills 2012). In the national imagination, as well as in the media, the politically subordinated and economically marginalized Isan people are regarded as gullible, uncouth, and unsophisticated second-class citizens (McCargo and Hongladarom. 2004). The rural Isan people are also racialized as "darker" than more urban higher-status Thai citizens, and less attractive (Maher and Lafferty 2014).

Previous studies on Thai wives of white Western men living in Thailand overwhelmingly focused on Isan women (Sunanta 2009; Tosakul 2010; Lapanun 2013) and so did research on Thai wives living abroad (Lisborg 2002; Suksomboon 2009; Plambech 2010; Charoensri 2010). Some studies demonstrated how Thai wives confronted negative stereotypes (e.g., the sex worker or gold-digger stereotypes) from people in both the host countries and Thailand; however, they did not adequately examine how these stereotypes are produced and reproduced through social interactions and institutions at the international and local levels. Existing studies primarily focused on cultural differences between Thai wives and their white Western husbands, the wives' struggles with economic hardships, and responsibilities for their natal families. However, they rarely examined social differences within Thai wives' groups. Nor did they take intersectional approach to examine how the interconnecting nature of gender, race,

ethnicity, class, and other socially constructed categories shaped their experiences in the host country and in Thailand when they were visiting home.

Using an intersectionality framework, this chapter examines Thai immigrant wives' narrative accounts on their daily interactions with people in the U.S. and in Thailand when they were visiting home with an emphasis on stereotypes that people placed upon them. This chapter also aims to uncover the intersection of systems of oppression such as racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of discrimination in their everyday interactions with the goal of contributing to the larger theoretical framework of how the multiple systems of domination work together in perpetuating totalizing, but misleading, representations of Thai wives of white U.S. men.

Data and Method

This study consists of interviews with 38 Thai wives of white U.S. men. I located them from a mix of purposive sampling and snowball sampling method from multiple sites (e.g., personal contacts, two Thai Buddhist temples, and online) (for more details about sample selection and rationale, see Chapter 2). I employed a 4-page-interview guide with open-ended questions and follow-up probes to ask about respondents' personal backgrounds; dating experiences; ideas about Thai women dating or marrying white Western men as they grew up; how they met their husbands; ideas they had about U.S. society; things people say upon learning they have a white U.S. husband; and their interactions with other people in everyday life in the U.S., such as husbands' family members, coworkers, friends, neighbors, and strangers. The analysis in this particular

chapter focused primarily on the gendered and racial/ethnic stereotypes people made about them in the U.S. and in Thailand when they were visiting home.

In the process of analysis, I read through all the transcripts of the completed interviews, identified the patterns of social interactions and recurring themes in Thai, using codes, when analyzing the data. I focused on the types of assumptions and contexts in which stereotypes about Thai wives occurred. For example, I found statements like "(someone) assumed that I was (something) when accompanying my husband," or "(someone) told my husband that I was (something)" emerged frequently from interview data. I then sorted these specific statements to determine what kinds of gendered and racial stereotypes the respondents encountered in their social interactions. I engaged the "intracategorical complexity approach" (McCall 2005) that focused on the intersection of multiple categories of a single analytical group to uncover the differences and complexity of experience within group. Using a constant comparative method (Glaser 1965), I coded interview data into thematic categories and compared respondents' descriptions within and across the respondents' social class, ethnicity, and places where they grew up (e.g., urban or rural), education, and occupation to identify how these differences shape their experiences with other people in the U.S. and in Thailand when they were visiting home. I analyzed whether Thai wives who came from rural and lower-income family backgrounds had similar or different experiences from Thai wives who had urban and middle-class family backgrounds. I particularly focused on the respondents' descriptions of bias on being stereotyped when interacting with people and their feelings in those situations. I later translated English relevant portions of coded interviews that reflected

the patterns of how Thai wives of white men were stereotyped to be presented in the findings. In the findings, I present quotes from the respondents and analyze them. I used pseudonyms to identify respondents.

Findings

"Thai Immigrant Wives": Negative Assumptions about Their Motives for Marriage

Due to the unequal political and economic relationships between Thailand and the U.S., one of the common assumptions of *mia farang* from friends and family members of white U.S. husbands is that Thai women marry their husbands mainly for material gain. About one-fourth of respondents (10 of 38) described specific events in which they learned of someone making negative remarks about them. For example, Kate, a 45-year-old nurse who met her 55-year-old husband from a dating website, told me that her mother-in-law believed that she was using her marriage to obtain legal U.S. status. Kate recalled:

> When we sat in a family gathering, my mother-in-law intentionally talked about my husband's eldest sister's previous marriage with an Icelandic man. She said that the man married my husband's sister just to get a green card, then he asked to divorce her. I knew that she raised that issue just to attack me, but I let it go.

On another occasion, when Kate was working with an elderly white female client whom she took care, she recalled:

> She told me that she did not understand why some American men marry "alien" wives because they don't work, and they are lazy. But she

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complimented me that I was the first one that she personally knew who worked. What she said made me think that perhaps most Americans view foreign wives as dependent and helpless women.

Other respondents recounted that sometimes their husbands' friends and families expressed disapproval out of the earshot of the Thai wives. Criticisms usually involved suspicions that the wives' motives for marriage were financial. Although most Thai wives did not hear criticisms from their husbands' friends and families firsthand, it did not mean that the criticisms did not occur. Some respondents said things like "I have never heard anyone talk bad in front of me, but I can't possibly know what they say behind my back," or "we don't really talk to each other," or "they never say something bad to me, but often give me the cold shoulder." These kinds of remarks suggest several respondents are very wary about concealed resentments and biases from their husbands' friends and families.

For those who have heard or learned of the criticisms, these criticisms were more common among friends and family of wealthier husbands and/or when they did not know how the couples met. For instance, Jean, a 37-year-old former banker in Thailand and housewife of a 43-year-old American high school teacher, recalled that her husband encountered such assumptions. One colleague at his school asked him, jokingly, if his wife was a "mail-order bride." Jean told me that she was irritated to hear such comment because she comes from an affluent family and met her husband in the U.S. while studying for a master's degree in business administration. In another example, Em, a 50-year-old, and a former high school teacher in Thailand, met Bob, a 65-year-old marine

biologist through her friend's introduction seven years ago when she was visiting her friend in the U.S. She had been divorced from a Thai husband since she was 39, and Bob was divorced twice. Em told me about negative comments coming from her mother-in-law as she recalled:

When we got married, my husband told me that his mom was worried I was going to deceive him. She didn't say it to me but warned my husband to be careful about marrying me and said that I was going to use him. My husband consoled me by saying that she did not personally attack me because she said the same thing to all her sons when they were getting married. I can see where she is coming from. She might think that I marry for his money. I am also the first foreign daughter-in-law she ever has. She sometimes complains about my English, saying it's hard to communicate with me. I know she doesn't think of me highly.

In a similar narrative account, Kalaya, a 38-year-old former high school teacher in Thailand, met her 41-year-old electrician husband twelve years ago when he was staying at the hostel she owned in a tourist city in northern Thailand for a year. She told me that when they started dating in Thailand, she even helped him financially because, at the time, he was living on unemployment benefits, and sometimes the check was late. However, her husband's sister was still suspicious about Kalaya's motives for marriage as she stated:

My husband's sister used to have this idea that I was going to swindle my husband out of money in marriage, and she warned him to be cautious. I

knew this because my husband told me (laugh). This is perhaps because she thinks that I don't work here [in the U.S.] and he gives me money, but she did not know that in Thailand it was the other way around. I ran a business and helped him with money for several months. I don't blame my sister-in-law because what she said is not true, but it might be true of other people. It's one bad apple that spoils the barrel.

Instead of defending other coethnic women, Kalaya's comments suggest that stereotypes that Thai women marry white U.S. men for money are generally true, but not true of her. This example showed that widespread racial and gendered stereotypes perpetuated by the dominant group in society also how Thai wives perceived other coethnic women. When Kalaya blamed other Thai wives, and not her sister-in-law, for stereotyping all Thai wives who marry American men, this is an example of internalized racism that occurs when members of an oppressed group rationalize and justify the validity of the existing stereotype made about their group. In other words, members of an oppressed group can unconsciously maintain the power structures that constrained them at the same time. I will investigate this dynamic further in Chapter 5.

It is worth noting that not only Americans had this kind of assumption about Thai wives, but also Thai immigrants in the U.S. For instance, Angel, a 34-year-old Thai wife, recalled that a Thai woman, who was a friend of her ex-white U.S. boyfriend, assumed that she was going to use marriage to achieve legal U.S. status. Angel has a bachelor's degree in hospitality management from Thailand, came to the US. when her aunt, a naturalized U.S. citizen living in the U.S. for more than 30 years, applied for a green card

for her and her parents when she was 22. She knew her 40-year-old white ex-boyfriend from work at a franchise restaurant. When he took her to see his former colleague, who was a Thai woman in her fifties, the woman said to her in Thai, "Please take good care of him, so that you'll get the paper quickly." Angel recalled:

> I was stunned and did not say anything because she assumed that I dated my ex-boyfriend, so I could marry him to get a green card. I was like…what paper? She had no clue that I already had a green card. I believe that many Thai people think like this. They probably assumed that I would get something out of this relationship. She was just one person who said it out loud.

Professional Wives: Penalized by Their Race and Gender, but Privileged by Their Educational and Occupational Statuses

While some Thai wives of white U.S. had bad experiences when interacting with husband' friends and family due to the widespread stereotypes about their gender, race, ethnicity, and immigrant status, it appeared that the class backgrounds of wives were a source of privilege in some contexts. It was noteworthy that most respondents who reported perceiving bias from husband's friends and family were housewives, part-time workers, or worked in service-sector jobs. However, professional Thai wives who worked in academic, science and technological fields (5 of 38) stated that they never received negative feedback from their husband's friends or family. All the five professional Thai wives came to the U.S. to study as self-funded international students before they got married with a white U.S. man. Being self-funded students suggests that these

respondents came from relatively affluent family backgrounds because the U.S. emerged as the third most-expensive country in terms of the costs of international study (Ipsos MORI 2014) and has the highest average tuition fees at both public and private colleges (OECD 2017). Some professional Thai wives believed that because of their educational training and professional status, they were not assumed to have been gold-diggers or sex workers prior to meeting their husband. For example, when asked what her ideas about Thai women marrying white men are, Suda, a 41-year-old engineer, stated that she thought of sex workers who met U.S. servicemen at the military bases (although she never actually met ones). When I continued asking what kinds of things Americans said to her upon learning that she was a Thai wife of a white U.S. man, Suda said:

> Are you asking if they see me as a wife of a G.I.? (laugh) No, I think it has something to do with my husband's social network of friends and colleagues. […] My husband and I are both scientists. All the people we socialize with are scientists and academics. They don't see me that way. His family does not expect that I will be like those kinds of women.

Similarly, Sasi, a 40-year-old wife who earned a Ph.D. in aquatic science and works as an employee of the U.S. government, told me that she never experienced any biases from husband's friends and family for being a Thai wife. She stated:

> My husband's friends and family know what I study and what my job is. They treat me like normal people do. I think when there is a marriage between an American and a foreigner, people want to know how we met. When we told them that we met in [graduate] school, they didn't think of

anything peculiar. It was not like that he went to Thailand and came back with a Thai wife. That would be unusual. [Interviewer: Can you say more about the marriages that are unusual?] Don't you think that it's strange? Do you think how long they knew each other before getting married? A week or two weeks? People might think that the woman does not love the man but uses marriage to get what she wants. [Interviewer: Like what?] All sorts of things, perhaps they might think they would have a better life abroad.

Although Thai immigrant wives might have a variety of reasons for marrying a white U.S. husband, an anecdote of impoverished women marrying for money or citizenship is the most common stereotype that is constantly reproduced by both Americans and Thais. When Sasi's identity was challenged by this stereotype, she deflected it by emphasizing her educational and occupational status as distinctive from other Thai wives. It is noteworthy that when Sasi brought up her educational background in our conversation, she frames her relationship with her husband as paralleling those of American couples who met and fell in love in college. As shown in Suda and Sasi's excerpts, they were aware of the negative stereotype placed upon Thai wives in general and even reaffirmed it, but they believed that such stereotypes did not apply to them.

However, these examples are not to suggest that highly educated and professional Thai wives could escape from other structures of oppression entirely. It appeared that their socioeconomic and occupational statuses could only abate the racial and gendered biases people had about them in some situations, but their gender and race/ethnicity still

played a negative role in situations where socioeconomic and occupational statuses were invisible. Some professional Thai wives believed that sometimes they had been treated with biases and stereotypes from strangers because of their race and gender. For example, Suda expressed her discomfort when she took her mother-in-law to a hospital for physical check-up without her husband. The medical personnel did not come to help her mother-in-law for more than 45 minutes even though there were no other patients. She believed that the medical personnel might assume that a young Asian woman who took an elderly white woman to hospital was her caretaker, not a daughter-in-law. Therefore, she did not require assistance. Suda's experience aligned with a study which showed that immigrant Asian Americans were 17 times more likely than Asian Americans born in the U.S. to report having been personally discriminated against when visiting a doctor or health clinic (National Public Radio et al. 2017). Some respondents believed that strangers would treat them and their white husbands differently because of their race and foreign signifiers (e.g., accent). For instance, Wan, a 38-year-old engineer and wife of a 37-year-old computer programmer, felt that when she took her two daughters to the playground, a white mother of neighborhood child turned a cold-shoulder to her. Wan recalled:

> I said hello to this white mother and a boy sitting next to me. She looked at me and said hi without a smile. Then, she turned her back towards me and ignored me. Later when my husband showed up and joined us, she became noticeably friendlier. She asked him how old my daughters were and asked about what kinds of food they liked and talked about her son being picky. I felt that she used a different tone from the one that she used

when saying hi to me, like she did not want to talk to me. [Interviewer: Why did you think she did not want to talk to you?] I don't know, maybe because I looked foreign to her, but it was just this one person that I met.

Although Wan stated that she never experienced any biases from her husband's friends and family, she felt that she was judged by her race in contexts where her educational and occupational credentials were not recognized, and her foreign accent stood out. She believed that the white mother acted coolly to her because of her foreign status. Wan interpreted this woman's action to mean that Asians are perpetual foreigners and that was the reason why this woman did not treat her as friendly as she did until her white husband arrived.

A Good Cook Is a Good Housewife: "Your Husband Is So Lucky"

Some stereotypes surrounding Thai wives of white U.S. men are not as stigmatizing as those of sex worker or gold-digger. Nonetheless, they still revolve around a racialized gendered expectation, such as the belief that Thai women are a good cooks and dedicated housewives. When asked what other people say to them about their ethnicity, nearly half of the respondents (18 of 38) answered that people often assumed that they must be a great cook, or good at housekeeping, and that their husbands were fortunate to have them as their wives. This was regardless of their class background and employment status. Surprisingly, most respondents did not view this stereotype as derogatory. Some respondents bought into this belief and even helped feed into this stereotype when interacting with Americans. In fact, presenting themselves as a good cook or good at housekeeping was one of the strategies employed by some Thai wives to

deflect from the stereotype of Thai women as sex workers or gold-diggers. For example, Pan, a 30-year-old freelance translator from Bangkok who met her 43-year-old business analyst husband from a dating website, commented that.

> I think it's a good thing that people admire us because they think that we are sweet and passive. We are good cooks. I mean, it's better than they think of us as former prostitutes. My husband's friends always compliment Thai food when we go eating out with them. They assumed that I must be able to cook this fancy Thai food at home for my husband. They had no idea that I just started cooking when I arrived the U.S. three years ago.

To be perceived as a woman who conformed to traditional femininity, as a good cook and a dedicated housewife, was a compliment for many respondents. Of the 18 respondents experienced stereotypes that they must be good at cooking and housekeeping, seventeen said they were glad when hearing someone made that assumption about them and felt obligated to perform those expectations with their best effort. The racial and gendered stereotype of Thai women as good cooks can also create self-fulfilling prophecies for Thai wives who never cooked prior to their marriage. As Pan stated in an example given earlier, she did not know how to cook prior to arriving to the U.S., but she conformed to the racialized gendered stereotype that Thai wives must know how to cook. Pan started teaching herself to cook Thai food from online videos after she came to the U.S. to live with her husband. Admitting that her husband did not pressure her to cook or do housework, she nonetheless felt obligated to cook and do

household chores because her work as a freelance translator did not occupy all of her time and she always worked at home. Pan also told me that, before leaving Thailand, her father, who was a commercial airline pilot, enjoined her to "be a good housewife" so that her husband will love her more. This illustrated how the belief about traditional gender arrangements was reinforced by Thai wives' parents as well.

Ratana, a 45-year-old Isan wife from a poor family background, believed that the stereotype of Thai wives as good cooks and homemakers had a positive impact on Americans' perception of Thai women, thus she was happy to help feed into this stereotype. She said:

I want to represent something good about Thailand. For example, I bring Thai food to the church where I, my husband, and my step-children usually go. Last week, I cooked Thai food at my husband's birthday party and his friends loved it. I introduced them to a Thai massage parlor owned by my Thai friend. I tried to be an ambassador for our (Thai) culture. A male guest praised me in front of my husband that I was a good cook, and jokingly said that he should find a Thai wife too. [Interviewer: What did you think about what he said?] When people praised me, I was happy.

While feminist scholars suggest that the widespread assumptions about Asian women as good cooks and housekeepers are a form of racist and sexist microaggressions that perpetuate racial and gender oppression (Sue et al. 2007; Levchak 2013), most respondents viewed such microaggressions as a compliment and even helped feed into this stereotype when interacting with Americans. However, an implication surrounding

this stereotype of Thai women being a good cook, falls into the notion that women always belong to kitchen. These dynamics illustrated the complex interplay of race, gender, immigrant and employment status of Thai immigrant wives. Because Thai immigrant wives, especially those who were unemployed, were stereotypically perceived as utilizing marriage for economic gains, they used the "good cook and housekeeper" stereotype as a positive attribute to redeem themselves as ideal housewives. In other words, using a "patriarchal bargain" (Kandiyoti 1988) by emphasizing their racialized femininity and conforming to the gender norms, they believed they boosted their likeability from husband's friends and family without undermining the gender inequality. In doing so, they could deflect negative stereotypes regarding their race, immigrant and employment status. Moreover, as scholars who studied cross-national romance observed, some white U.S. men seek to marry Asian or Latina women abroad because they think white U.S. women are "overly liberated" and place their careers ahead of family (Constable 2003; Schaeffer-Grabiel 2006). Therefore, it was possible that most respondents embraced the good cook and housekeeper stereotype with pride because it was an attempt to distance themselves from dominant representations of white women as career-oriented. Presenting themselves as a good cook and dedicated homemaker also deflects stereotypes of Thai wives as former sex workers or gold-diggers, about which I will discuss in Chapter 5.

However, this is not to blame the victims or to suggest that Thai immigrant wives perpetuate gender inequality of their own, but to point out the complexity of structural inequalities that intersect with each other in creating the "matrix of domination" (Collins

2000). As most respondents did not have a U.S. degree and moved to the U.S. upon marriage, their status as immigrant women with limited human capital (e.g., no U.S. degree or lack of English proficiency) left them with no choice but to assume a housewife role upon their arrival to the U.S. Of the 21 respondents who are either housewives (11 of 38) or part-time workers (10 of 38), only three earned a U.S. degree and lived in the U.S. prior to their marriage. Some respondents (7 of 21) had children within the first year of marriage and were held responsible for childcare. Thus, even though they wanted to pursue full-time employment outside the home to deflect the gold-digger stereotypes, their choices were limited by their responsibility for child rearing. These women came to define domesticity as their full-time job, hence supporting a stereotype of Thai wives as good cooks and homemakers and viewing it as positive rather than negative.

Nevertheless, some respondents who had jobs outside the home, were uncomfortable with this stereotype and challenged its implication. For example, Wassana, who is a 31-year-old project manager in a non-profit organization that helps Southeast Asian immigrants and a wife of a 29-year-old economic journalist, commented that it was "racist" to assume that all Asian women were good cooks. She stated:

> One time, when a white male colleague learned that my husband and I
> share a house with his older brother, he asked, "Do you have to cook for
> both of them?" He thought that the only Asian woman in the house must
> be the one who cooks or is a homemaker. I think that is kind of racist. **He**
> **probably wouldn't ask the same question if I were a white woman**. In

fact, it is my husband who regularly cooks. I cook only Thai food once a

week and I only cook when I'm not too tired. (emphasis added)

Perhaps because of Wasana's background in non-profit social activism and her involvement with marginalized women and racial minority communities in the U.S., she interpreted her colleague's comment about her being the person who cooks as a form of racial bias directed at non-white women. The stereotype of Thai wives as good cooks and housekeepers perhaps originates from the popularity of Thai food in the U.S. combined with the widespread Orientalist tropes about Asian women being subservient, docile, and family-oriented. This stereotype, however, indirectly serves to benefit and protect white U.S. men's interest by justifying the unequal power between white U.S. husbands and Thai immigrant wives in international marriages and placing Thai immigrant women in domesticity. It consolidates racist and sexist notions that relegate Thai immigrant women solely to the private sphere, while ignoring the fact that there are white U.S. women who are housewives too. This stereotype reiterates the notion that Thai immigrant wives will always be dependent to their U.S. husbands. Even for Thai wives who joined the workforce as part-time workers, their jobs were primarily low-paid with limited working hours so that they could focus on their family life. This stereotype is embedded in the racial and gendered structures of oppression and undermines the ability of Thai immigrant women to achieve greater mobility and independence in U.S. society without their husbands' supports.

Through a Thai Lens: Ethnic Bias which Linked Mia Farangs to Sex Work

Most respondents were familiar with and drew on negative stereotypes of *mia farang* from folklore and media in Thailand, as well as hearing others invoke the stereotype in Thai context. When asked about the ideas they have about Thai women who date or marry white Western men, more than half (23 of 38) of the respondents asserted that if they see a Thai woman dating a "*farang*," or white man in Thailand, they would suspect that the woman was a "prostitute." For example, Bonnie, a 28-year-old waitress from Bangkok, stated:

> A white man and a Thai woman? The first thing that crosses my mind is a prostitute. [Interviewer: Why?] I don't know why but people talk about that, and I saw it from movies and TVs. I don't know if it is true, but it is the first thing that crosses my mind. You know when I started dating my husband, I was embarrassed to walk with him. We were here in America, not in Thailand. But I was afraid that people would think I was a prostitute. I know that dating a white boyfriend is normal here, but I can't help thinking about it. The image has been imprinted in my head.

Some respondents redefined the term "*mia farang*" to include "*mia chao*,"—a derogatory term commonly used among Thais to describe Thai women who provide sexual and housework services to international male tourists in exchange for money. When asked what kinds of ideas she has about *mia farang*, Minnie, a light-skinned 45-year-old Chinese-Thai wife, who has an MBA degree from an American university commented:

I thought of "*mia chao*" who had a rural background and dark skin tone. Western men like women with those kinds of features (Interviewer: What kinds of features?) Like…dark-skinned, very skinny…who speak in Isan dialect. I'm not insulting anyone, but it was something that I saw from tourist places [in Thailand]…dark-skinned women from Isan walking arm-in-arm with old white men. (Interviewer: How could you tell that they were *mia chao*?) I don't know. I probably just guessed from the ways they dressed such as a spaghetti-strap tank top and shorts, or mini-skirt.

Likewise, Mary, a medium-light skinned 40-year-old Thai wife who was an assistant manager at a five-star hotel in Bangkok, commented about her perception of Thai wives of white men:

I think of darker-skinned Thai women. I don't know why white men are attracted to darker-skinned Thai women so much. **They had faces like rural Isan factory workers**, **or bargirls at Pattaya**. When I traveled to Pattaya, white men never showed interest in me. So, I thought that I wasn't a white men's type, but I always saw them walking arm-in-arm with **darker-skinned, ugly women** who dressed in sexy outfits. I thought those women were white men's type. (emphasis added)

Minnie and Mary not only linked *mia farang* with sex work, but also an ethnic Isan background, social class, darker skin tone, and places where (they assumed) the couples met. Rural Isan people are racialized within Thailand as darker than higher-status urban Central Thais and deemed physically less attractive in the local context (Lyttleton

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1994; Hesse-Swain 2006; Maher and Lafferty 2014). Moreover, media and academic research have portrayed rural Isan women who met their white Western husbands through work in major Thai tourist cities as primary participants in cross-national marriage (Cohen 2003; Sunanta 2009; Charoensri 2010, Lapanun 2013). These dynamics resemble what Cabezas (2004) found about Cuban sex workers (*jinetero*) in her study—only black Cuban women who fraternized with foreign tourists were stereotyped as sex workers, while lighter-skinned women who did the same were not. Darker-skinned Thai wives from affluent urban backgrounds were afraid to be perceived as prostitutes when accompanying their husbands in public spaces too. For example, Kai, a 42-year-old, dark-skinned Thai wife who came to the U.S. eighteen years ago to earn a master's degree in business administration, commented:

> If you are with white men in Thailand, Thai people tend to assume that you are a prostitute and what happened was that they were staring at me and my husband when we walked down the street in my hometown (a city in the Southern Thailand). That made me feel uncomfortable and I didn't want to walk near my husband. The thing is **I fit the stereotype because I'm dark**, and my face fits the stereotype. (emphasis added)

Although these examples may imply that criticisms about *mia farang*s were just ideas some respondents had in their minds, other respondents (15 of 38) asserted having been encountered biases in their actual interactions with people in Thailand at one point or another. These respondents reported encounters with by passers that snickered at them when accompanying their husbands to public places in Thailand. Sometimes, these

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encounters were far worse than snickering or smirking. Naree, a 44-year-old dark-skinned Thai wife from Bangkok, recounted her experience at an Isan food shack in Thailand as she stated:

We ordered some Isan food at this food shack in [a beach city in Thailand], and they served us the wrong order. I ordered a dish of papaya salad without "*pla-ra*" (a Lao seasoning produced by fermenting fish which has strong smell), but they gave me a *pla-ra* papaya salad. I told the waitress that I could not eat this. So, she told the cook lady, but the cook lady called me out that **I was a sell-out and that I was just an ex-whore** who pretended to be a higher-class lady because I refused to eat *pla-ra*. **Maybe she thought I was an Isan woman because I had dark skin** but that was not the point. I didn't like *pla-ra* and I didn't order it. I was so mad that I walked right out of that shack. (emphasis added)

For a respondent who identified as Isan-Thai, Rose, a 30-year-old, dark-skinned Isan wife, stated that when travelling to a beach city in Thailand with her husband, Thai vendors assumed and referred to her husband as her "client," while trying to trick him into buying something. She stated:

[Thai vendors] always asked me to persuade my husband to buy things or services from them at overly-high price. An employee at a massage parlor said, "help me sister, we have to make some money from white people." [Interviewer: Why did you think he said that?] **Maybe because I had a Lao face**. [Interviewer: How did your face have anything to do with that?]

Most "working women" that I've seen at the beach city were from Isan.

Some of these women get customers to the local business, but some of the

local business people were not happy and turned hostile when I would not

help them get more money. (emphasis added)

It was noteworthy that some respondents assumed that Isan wives of darker skin

tones were sex workers even when this assumption is not true. Respondents who had

light- to medium-skin tone (8 of 20) and darker-skin tone (7 of 18) revealed that they had

personally encountered, heard, or felt criticisms directed at them from fellow Thais in

Thailand, regardless of their skin tone or their ethnicity. They also verified that these

criticisms specifically targeted Thai women accompanying white Western men. For

example, Rin, a 40-year-old light skinned Thai wife from the northern Thailand, told me

that the hotel front desk in Bangkok did not allow her to go to her room alone without her

husband accompanying her because they suspected that she was a prostitute soliciting a

client. Three other respondents who had urban, middle-class backgrounds reported

having the same negative experience with hotel receptionists in Thailand. On one

occasion, Kalaya, a 38-year-old, light-skinned Thai wife who was a high school teacher,

recalled a rude taxi driver as she travelled with her husband in Bangkok. When she urged

the driver to drive faster, he said to her in Thai, "Why so hurry? Your *farang* is not going

to run away from you," She said, "I thought he was implying that I was a prostitute going

to hotel with a client." Natt, a 41-year-old, medium-skinned Thai wife of a 42-year-old

lawyer, recounted that when she was trying to negotiate a ride fare with a Tuk Tuk taxi

driver in Chiang Mai, the driver got frustrated and told her in Thai that: "Why do you

have to care (about the fare) so much? Why don't you just ask your client to pay for it?" Natt angrily told the driver that his "client" was her husband and it was her money, not his before she walked away.

These examples provided the evidence of ethnic biases among Thai wives. Although many respondents experienced biases from Thais regardless of their ethnicity, some of them still linked ethnicity with sex work to disparage Isan women in their narrative accounts. It is important to note that more than half of the respondents (23 of 38), including seven dark-skinned Isan women, did not speak on this subject or said they never encountered any forms of biases from Thais when accompanying their husbands to public places. However, when Irene, a 36-year-old former sex worker I introduced in Chapter 1, said that she had never encountered direct biases from Thais, she added that, "I knew what people might think about *mia farang*, but I didn't care anyhow," indicating that she perhaps had indeed encountered some biases, but chose to save her embarrassment by not talking about them.

A Tree That Bears Gold: Assumptions and Demands from Natal Family

Perceptions of *mia farang* are not uniform among all Thais. People from a less-powerful country than the U.S. often imagine coethnic immigrants who live and work in the U.S. as more affluent than themselves due to the income disparity between richer and poorer countries (Thai 2008). While some Thais perceive a *mia farang* as a stigmatized status, several parents, relatives and close friends of the wives viewed them as economically successful because of the perceived benefits that accrue to the women and their families (Tosakul 2010; Lapanun 2013). These perceived benefits include financial

support from the husband or an opportunity to live and work in the U.S., where the relative-wage is higher than in Thailand. When asked what kinds of ideas their parents have about them marrying a white U.S. man, none of respondents said their parents were against them, and more than half said they gladly approved that their daughter marrying a white U.S. man.

Although the stereotype of Thai wives of white U.S. men as well-off due to the income disparity between Thailand and the U.S. may help promote the positive image of *mia farang* at first glance, this stereotype is a double-edged sword that often poses numerous challenges to Thai wives who suffer from the demands by their natal family. This was especially the case when the wives were not as well-off as their natal family thought they were. On one hand, this stereotype highlights the successful story of a group to be admired; on the other hand, it produces a totalizing, but misleading, representation of Thai wives of white men. The stereotype that characterizes all *mia farangs* as affluent obscures experiences of Thai wives who did not succeed economically and discounts their struggles as immigrants living and working abroad.

In many Asian countries with a poor welfare system, providing monetary support to elderly parents has always been a common familial practice (Thai 2012). Of the 38 respondents, twenty-four stated that they sent remittances to their parent(s) on a monthly basis. Respondents who came from a rural and economically-disadvantaged family (14 of 38) were more likely than those who had an affluent background to share with me about how much money they sent home and the pressure to fulfill familial expectations that they must be upwardly mobile so as to be able to financially support their family in

important matters such as paying family debts or purchasing land and housing. For some respondents, marrying a white U.S. man might improve their economic power in their natal family, but it also put them under pressure to meet family expectations as a primary transnational source of income at the same time.

For example, Kate, a 45-year-old Isan nurse who worked in Bangkok, told me that her parents had a huge sum of debt (approximately 100,000 U.S. dollars) due to many years of crop failures. She saw that there was no way for her 30,000 Thai baht (about 950 U.S. dollars) salary to pay them off. Kate divorced a Thai navy soldier after he had an affair twelve years ago when she was 33. She started corresponding with a white U.S. biologist who was ten years her senior via e-mails in 2007, and married him two years later. She admitted that her motives of marriage were both romantic and economic. She stated that her husband was nice and that she enjoyed corresponding with him very much despite learning that he had two children from his previous marriage with a foreign-born Korean woman. However, Kate admitted that she also wanted to work in the U.S. to pay her parents' debt too.

Kate asserted that she was irritated when her parents assumed that by "marrying a white U.S. man," her husband would give her a large sum of money every month. She also stated that she never asked her husband for money. Upon arriving to the U.S., Kate worked for five years in several low-wage part-time jobs such as a babysitter, waitress, elderly caregiver, and dog walker before she passed the licensed test to become a registered nurse in the U.S. She told me that her income from all part-time jobs combined was triple her nurse salary in Thailand. After she became a registered nurse in the U.S., it

was nearly ten times higher than what she earned in Thailand. By comparing her wage in Thailand, she was satisfied with the income she earned and could pay off most of her parents' debt. Assuming that she was well-off in the U.S., her father continued to ask for monetary assistance with his investment in farming. For example, a few years prior, her father asked her for 3,500 U.S. dollars to start a mango farm, but she refused to give him money. She complained about her father's lack of financial discipline and his demand for monetary support. She said:

> I felt that my parents did not appreciate my hard work and they were not good at saving money. They think that I was a tree that bears gold. […] I did not want to spoil him by giving him money to invest in a failed business over and over. I knew that if I gave him money, he was going to lose it all. He thought, like most older rural people have thought, that I lived a comfortable life abroad and, as a daughter, I had a commitment to give him money whenever he wanted.

The Thai wives' change in economic power due to their jobs in the U.S. gave them both respectable status and burden in their natal family at the same time. Citing strong family ties as a reason, they were obligated to provide resources and financial support for their family in Thailand. Instead of using their money to establish financial stability in their conjugal family, they had to share it with their natal family because of the assumptions from their natal family that they were well-off.

For example, Rin, a 45-year-old wife, was born to a farming family with nine siblings in the rural northern region of Thailand. Her eighteen-year-old sister who

married a clothing store owner took her in after their parents died when she was thirteen. At the age of nineteen, a female villager friend, who married a U.S. man, introduced Rin to Sam, a 44-year-old engineer. Rin said that she did not love Sam but married him anyway because he gave her sister money to build a new house. In the U.S., Sam was rich, but frugal with money. He rarely gave her money. After being a stay-at-home wife for almost six years, Rin found a job as a cook at a Thai restaurant in town and was able to start collecting her own money. When she was 40, she divorced Sam and married Eric, a 40-year-old white U.S. man she knew through a mutual friend. Eric was not as rich as Sam, but they could save up enough money and open up a Thai restaurant.

When asked what kinds of ideas her relatives have about her marriage with white U.S. men, she recounted that her relatives in Thailand did not understand that she had to work hard to earn money. She strongly felt that they were taking advantage of her as they expected her to buy things for them when visiting Thailand. She said:

Every time I visited Thailand, I spent at least 10,000 U.S. dollars per trip

for my family. If I bought a handbag for one sister, the others would be

upset that I did not buy something for them. So, I had no choice but to buy

one for everyone or not at all. When one of my sister's son had to undergo

brain surgery, she asked me to pay for it in full. When the other sister's

son wanted to become ordained as a Buddhist monk, she asked me to help

fund him for the ceremonial expenditures. If I did not have so many

relatives, I would have enough money to buy a house by now.

Although Rin felt that her relatives were taking advantage of her, she found it difficult to opt out of these obligations. She stated that she wanted to retire and relocate to Thailand someday. Thus, this transnational connection to her natal family in Thailand is necessary for her.

As Thai (2012) observes, transnational marriage positions daughters as important financial providers for their natal family. They are expected by their elderly parents and relatives to give monetary assistance to those living in homeland because they assume that the wives are economically well-off. Many of them were under pressure and expected to provide monetary resources to their natal families even when they had low-wage income in the U.S., or when they were unemployed and did not have personal source of income.

Mai, a 43-year-old housewife, married her 55-year-old engineer husband and immigrated to the U.S. six years ago. They lived in an apartment with no children of their own. Her husband gave her 1,000 U.S. dollars a month for household expense and she wired about 300 U.S. dollars to support her mother and her 21-year-old son from her previous relationship in Thailand. Because she did not have her own source of income, she felt grateful to her husband but complained about her mother's financial demand. She also linked this problem to her status as a *mia farang*. She stated:

> My mom assumed that all white men were rich, but my husband is not
> rich. We still live in an apartment and have to pay rent every month. I
> don't work so I don't have money. I feel bad when I have to ask my
> husband to provide support for something other than what he gives me on

a monthly basis, for example when mom wanted to buy a new car and asked me to pay for a down payment. When I talked to my mom that her demand was too much and that I did not have money, she would say, "Why don't you go ask your husband?" It seems like she did not understand or refused to believe that not all white U.S. men were rich.

The stereotype of *mia farang* as economically well-off might be partly true for some Thai wives who work outside of the home due to the income disparity between the U.S. and Thailand. However, this positive stereotype comes with a cost when the wives have no income. Most respondents who were unemployed but used their husbands' money to support their family members in Thailand were very reluctant to share their financial situations with me. They said something like, "my husband gave me *some* money," but were unwilling to say how much. Some husbands (7 of 11) led their unemployed wives use their credit cards to pay grocery and gas, but the wives had to ask them for other extra expenses. Although none of the respondents admitted that they had conflicts with their husbands or revealed that their husbands had financial difficulties, some respondents asserted that they know someone who had an argument with their husband over the issue of sending remittance to Thailand. For example, Noi, a 40-year-old housewife, told me that her 57-year-old husband, who was an automotive company owner, gave her 2,000 U.S. dollars a month and she remitted 1,000 U.S. dollars to her parents in Thailand. She stated:

[My husband] gives me money and never asks about what I spend it on.

But some husbands don't understand why Thai wives have to remit money

to their families in Thailand and they argue. Sometimes, a Thai wife came

to borrow my money to send it to her mom in Thailand because her

husband wouldn't give her.

In conclusion, misrepresentations that all *mia farang*s succeeded in cross-national

marriage with white U.S. men obscure the wide diversity of circumstances among Thai

wives, especially those who were unemployed and whose husbands were not affluent. A

stereotype that all white U.S. men were well-off which was constructed by some family

members of Thai wives also illustrated the power of white hegemonic masculinity that

shaped ideas of non-Western people living outside Western countries. In most cases, the

wives' families did not know the husbands' class statuses, but they judge them based on

their race and nationality as more than half of the respondents' parents told their

daughters that they were "lucky" to have white U.S. husbands. This stereotype sometimes

posed challenges for some wives who were either unemployed or low-wage workers in

the U.S. as they were expected by their families.

Conclusion

Drawing on interviews with 38 Thai wives of white U.S. men, the primary

purpose of this chapter was to identify the types and dynamics of racial and gendered

stereotypes experienced by Thai wives of white U.S. men. The respondents reported

having encountered one or more of the five stereotypes discussed in this chapter. Family

members and friends of their husbands often assumed that Thai wives, like other non-

Western foreign brides, were uneducated poor women from a "backward country" who

married U.S. men for no other reason but to obtain U.S. legal status or take money from their husbands and send it back home to their families.

One problem with such assumption was that it obscured or overlooked that fact that many Thai wives were college educated; some were professionals who earned decent wages in Thailand; and some earned their post-graduate degree in the U.S. Intersectionality theory posits that while the Thai wives may be biased against on the basis of gender, ethnicity, or foreign signifiers, their socioeconomic status and other social capital (e.g., educational training and professional status) might intersect to shape different experiences with people they interact with in everyday life. The narrative accounts from five U.S. educated professional Thai wives showed that when family members and friends of husbands recognized the wives' class backgrounds (e.g., educational trainings or professional status), assumptions that they marry for economic gains withered away. However, they still described feelings of bias or prejudice on the basis of their race or foreign signifiers in some situations where their educational and professional credentials were not recognized.

Most the respondents perceived remarks about them being good at cooking and housekeeping with a positive light, indicating their complicity to the heteronormative gender ideologies to view domesticity as the pillar of femininity. Only one respondent viewed that the remarks reflected a racist assumption that denigrated Thai (or Asian) women, while other respondents were not sensitive to the comments that perpetuated the racial and gendered stereotyped image of Thai (or Asian) women that they belonged in the kitchen. This stereotyped image is widespread, including among Thai wives

themselves. Many Thai wives buy into this image, and some even helped feed into the stereotype in their interactions with Americans. However, my purpose is not to blame the oppressed individuals but, rather, to illustrate the powerful forces of gender and racial stereotypes that are deeply woven into the fabric of societies at global scale, and shape Thai women's worldviews and perceptions of their statuses.

Although a dominant discourse in Thailand, as observed from respondents' individualized beliefs, tended to racialize dark-skinned rural Isan women who dated white Western men as sex workers, narrative accounts from other respondents revealed that this was not the case since many respondents who were not dark-skinned Isan wives experienced the same kind of bias and prejudice from Thais when visiting Thailand. However, several respondents still linked ethnicity and skin tones to the sex worker stereotype.

Lastly, I provided an example of a stereotype that may appear positive yet produced economic challenges to Thai wives. On one hand, the stereotype that *mia farangs* are well-off highlights and admires women who succeeded and obtained perceived benefits from cross-national marriage, on the other hand, this stereotype overlooks the fact that many of them do not receive the expected rewards or struggle as immigrant wives in the U.S.

In conclusion, this chapter revealed the intersecting operation of class, gender bias, racism, colorism, and the unequal global political economy as the sources of these stereotypes. Some limitations of this study were that, during the interviews, although I wanted respondents to describe how other people treated them in social interactions,

several respondents spent much time describing their beliefs or ideas about how other people might perceive them, rather than describing the specific incidents or events that people treated them differently. Perhaps this was due to my lack of ability to probe or help jog the respondents' memories of events or experiences that they might forget adequately. They could only give examples of such events when there was a clearly overt act of bias. It was difficult to ascertain whether some respondents never encountered stereotypes placed upon them or they did not interpret some remarks or actions made by other people as an act of bias or prejudice.

Furthermore, in this study, I specifically explored the differences of biases from people they know (e.g., husbands' family members and friends) but did not adequately analyzed biases from strangers in the U.S. context. Future studies might explore these differences in terms of types and dynamics of the stereotypes from people the wives know versus strangers.

Moreover, this study consisted of only five Thai wives who worked in academic, science and technological fields. These respondents remarkably attributed their educational and professional credentials to be the reason they were not treated negatively in their interactions with husbands' friends and families. Future research might include more immigrant wives with high education and a prestigious career to explore how these forms of privilege may potentially counter-interact with racial and gender bias of foreign-born wives of white U.S. men.

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Chapter 5:

"Good Woman vs Bad Woman":

How Thai Wives of White U.S. Men Manage Racial and Gender Stereotypes

Chapter Summary

Drawing on interviews with thirty-eight Thai immigrant wives of white men, this chapter examines how Thai wives who amply varied in their class backgrounds engaged in strategies to manage and cope with the racial and gender stereotypes of Thai wives of white men as "immoral women" (e.g., utilizing marriage for obtaining U.S. legal status, gold-diggers, or former prostitutes). Some of these strategies involve an "intraethnic othering" – a specific othering processes that occurs when members of racially subordinated groups inculcate an oppressive view from the dominant racist society toward their own group and start to affirm negative stereotypes of other members of their group (Pyke and Dang 2003; Pyke 2010b). Some respondents engaged the social distancing on the basis of class by which middle-class or class-privileged groups defined themselves through their perceived difference and distanced themselves from lower-class groups in terms of taste and behavior, rendering them not representatives of their groups. Some respondents differentiated femininity by race. In relation to the construction of white U.S. women as overly career-oriented and incompetent in domesticity, some respondents viewed gender traits in racialized terms and constructed their femininity as more desirable by white U.S. men. This chapter examined how class intersects with race and gender in relation to these coping strategies and how a group of Thai wives of white

U.S. men employed these strategies in deflecting the negative stereotypes of "*mia farang*s" – Thai wives of white U.S. men – while reproducing it at the same time. The consequences of utilizing these strategies prove that the interwoven nature of the structure of oppression are difficult to resist because each form of oppression does not exist separately from each other. Hence, the strategy that resists one form of oppression may be trapped into reinforcing the other.

Introduction

Western representations have constructed Asian foreign women involved in romantic relationships and sexual exchange with white Western men through tourism, cross-national correspondence, and matchmaking agency brokers as commodity objects, victims, or victimizers (Pyke 2010a; Zare and Mendoza 2011). Early academic discourses and mass media depicted women involved in such relationships as former prostitutes who met their clients through sex work even when the boundaries between commercial sexual labor and romantic love have become blurred in a tourist context (Brennan 2001; Cohen 2003; Cabezas 2004), or helpless women in need of economic security (So 2006). These totalizing representations put racial and gender stereotypes on Thai wives and shape Thai immigrant wives' views about themselves, and interactions with other people in the U.S. context as I discussed in Chapter 4. However, these representations ignore class issues because not all the foreign brides of U.S. men are poor or unskilled. There is evident of growing numbers of middle-class and professional foreign brides who have engaged in

cross-national marriage with U.S. men and these U.S. men are not all wealthy (Constable 2003; Schaeffer-Grabiel 2004).

Race, gender, and class are interlocking systems of oppression; but they are also the social arrangements from which individuals derive their core identities (Ezzell 2009). This framework implies that members of a subordinated group may resist one form of oppression in which they are disadvantaged, yet overlook, or even reproduce, a form of oppression in which they benefit. For example, white, middle-class feminist women may perceive gender oppression but may not acknowledge how much their race and class privilege them (Collins 2000; Nash 2008). Sometimes, members of a subordinated group may act in the ways that challenge a dominant group's stereotype about their group yet seek approval from the dominant group by distancing themselves from other members of their group. For example, middle-class black residents believe that they challenge the assumptions that black neighborhoods are deteriorated by relocating themselves into the formerly impoverished black communities, but they still label some lower-class black residents in their neighborhoods as "ghettos," By labeling the lower-class black residents as such, the middle-class black residents can assert their moral superiority, while invalidating "ghetto" individuals as representatives of their race (King 2002; Moore 2005; Hyra 2006). This chapter integrates the dynamics of micro-level social interaction and macro-structures of oppression (e.g., class, race, and gender) that govern those dynamics by examining the ways in which the Thai wives manage and cope with the negative stereotypes of being a "*mia farang*" – Thai wife of white man.

Constructing the Other and Intraethnic Othering

Social interactionist scholars define "othering" as a process of collective identity work that requires the invention of categories and ideas about what marks individuals as different and belonging to such categories from the standpoint of the dominant group, hence creating and reproducing inequalities (Schwalbe et al. 2000). Othering can take place in many forms. Oppressive othering is a process that occurs when members of a more powerful or privileged group distinguish themselves from a group that they mark as inferior (Taylor et al. 2018). Defensive othering, on the other hand, occurs when members of a subordinated group internalize aspects of their oppressors and accept "the legitimacy of a devalued identity" imposed on other members of their group by a dominant group, but then saying, in effect, "There are indeed Others to whom this applies, but it does not apply to me" (Schwalbe et al. 2000:425). For example, some welfare recipients criticized other women who receive welfare as lazy, unmotivated, or as cheating the system (Seccombe 1998); or "dropper" homeless persons, who were once middle-class but had fallen on hard times and wished that they would return to the housed life someday, disparaged "drifter" homeless persons who spent most of their lives on the street as dirty and disgusting (Hodgetts et al. 2012).

Pyke and Dang (2003) used a specific term "intraethnic othering" to describe a specific form of defensive othering that occurs among coethnics in subordinated groups. This process builds on the concept of "internalized racial oppression" (Padilla 2001; Pyke 2010b) in which a racial minority group (e.g., Hispanics/Latinos, African-Americans, or Asians in U.S. society) internalize and believe the negative stereotypes imposed on them

by the dominant group as true about some members of their group, then employ various strategies to distance themselves from such stereotypes (Kibria 2002). In constructing their identities, some Asian Americans relied heavily on the negative stereotypical images of Asian people imposed by the dominant U.S. discourse (Osajima 1993). This dynamic leads to the negative feelings towards other coethnics in the form of hatred or embarrassment. For instance, more assimilated members of an immigrant ethnic group looked down on the less assimilated coethnic peers for not being able to act like a dominant group (e.g., white American) and avoided associating with those who seemed to perpetuate the stereotype of unassimilated foreigners (Pyke and Dang 2003).

The dynamics of intraethnic othering and internalized racial oppression have been illuminated in several studies on immigrants and Asian American identity. For example, second-generation Chinese and Korean Americans sometimes develop a sense of resentment and disidentification toward recently immigrated coethnics when they feel that their American identity is threatened by these newly-arrived immigrants who reinforce "foreignness" in the eyes of others (Kibria 2002; Pyke and Dang 2003). Japanese transnational high school students in California use labels such as "Japs" or "FOBs" to identify coethnic students who are still in English Learning Development (ELD) class, so as to cast them as inferior non-native-English-speaking students (Shao-Kobayashi and Dixon 2012). Older-generation Korean immigrant parents also express strong resistance against certain stereotypes attributed to their ethnic group by positioning themselves as "atypical Korean parents" setting themselves apart from the "typical Korean parents" who are "too ethnically traditional" (e.g., too strict about their children's

achievements) (Yu 2017). I will apply the concept of intraethnic othering in explaining how the respondents construct their identities and respond to the stigma as a foreign-born wife of white U.S. man.

Class Tension Within an Ethnic Group

"Intraracial class tension" or "intraracial class conflict" broadly refers to class divisions within a racial/ethnic community that occur when class-privileged racial/ethnic minorities become more socially, economically, and geographically distant from lower-class coethnics, creating the conflicts between the rich and the poor, or the highly-educated and less-educated (Hyra 2006; Pyke 2010b). Several scholars have addressed the problem of class disparities and its potential to dismantle gender and racial solidarity within a racial/ethnic community (Espiritu and Ong 1994; McDonald 1997; Moore 2005; Hyra 2006). Influenced by the notions of post-race color-blindness, philosophy of the American Dream, and equal opportunity, economically well-off racial/ethnic minorities who advocate a merit-based worldview refuse to see race and gender as a source of inequality; they believe that race and gender have no bearing on an individual's success, thus blaming those who do not succeed for their lack of personal qualities and efforts (Vasquez 2011). Racial/ethnic minorities who ascend either to as middle-class or elite often display negative attitudes and behaviors toward the poor in their racial/ethnic community (Hyra 2006). They use the culture of poverty discourse to critique the morality of the coethnic poor. For example, some powerful and wealthy African-American actors and public figures, such as Bill Cosby or Chris Rock, blamed and ridiculed cultural values and moralities of lower-class African-Americans for their own

predicaments (Pyke 2010b:565); or the middle-class volunteer black women who provided maternal care in the black community believed that befriending lower-income black women could pose threats to their personal security due to the pervasive drug culture associated with lower-income blacks (McDonald 1997). These examples illustrated the dynamics of defensive othering. In so doing the negative racial stereotype of blacks as morally wrong and dangerous, which is imposed by the dominant U.S. discourse, is still maintained and reproduced. These examples illustrated that class can become an axis around which internalized racism tilts. Relying on only one axis of oppression, instead of recognizing its mutually constitutive nature, cannot fully understand the experiences of those who are multiply disadvantaged and those who are privileged and oppressed by different forms of oppression (Espiritu 1997; Nash 2008).

Racializing Femininities as a Way of Othering

The intersectional view posits that race and gender are constructed through interactions and within social and institutional constraints (Andersen 2006). Some studies suggest that women may reproduce racial inequality by engaging in gender performances that devalue some forms of racialized femininities (Bettie 2003; Pyke and Johnson 2003). For example, some second-generation Korean and Vietnamese women constructed gendered behaviors of white and Asian women as racially distinct, and regarded white femininity characterized by assertiveness, confidence, and independence as superior to Asian femininity characterized by submissive demeanor (Pyke and Johnson 2003).

Race and gender are employed in creating inequalities. The relationship of domination and subordination between white femininity and Asian femininity is an

outcome of the intersection of gender and race (Schippers 2007). However, when some non-U.S.-born, non-Western women view gender practices as racially distinct, they rely on these racialized distinctions as the basis to sell a version of femininity that, they believe, is desired by U.S. men (Constable 2003; Schaeffer-Grabiel 2004). In other word, some non-U.S.-born, non-Western women are aware that U.S. men are fed up with allegedly feminist, career-oriented women in the U.S., thus they accentuate these racialized differences so as to attract white U.S. men in international marriage market (Schaeffer-Grabiel 2004).

I presented data in Chapter 4 that some Thai wives viewed a stereotype of themselves as good cooks and homemakers as positive. They were utilizing what Kandiyoti (1988) referred to as "bargaining with patriarchy" or the strategizing of women within a set of constraints so as to maximize their life chances. However, in Chapter 4, I have not provided enough analyses on how the respondents drew on their notions of racialized womanhood into their othering process. Specifically, this chapter examines how non-U.S., non-Western women negotiate, participate in and reproduce male dominant structure by utilizing racialized gender or gendered race. While scholarly works often represent non-white, non-Western women who participate in cross-national marriage with white Western men as escaping from the male dominant structure (Shankar and Northcott 2009), I suggest we should consider that they also conform to and reproduce male dominant relations in the household upon marrying white Western men men. Building on the notion of racialized femininity, this chapter examines how Thai

wives construct their version of femininity in relation to white U.S. women in their responses to the racial gendered stereotypes of them as good cooks and homemakers.

Studies on cross-national marriage in the U.S. that involved interviewing Asian immigrant wives (Yuh 2002; Constable 2003; Moriizumi 2011) revealed interesting dynamics among Asian wives who are married to U.S. men. These women were aware of the simplistic, racist, and sexist stereotyped images of Asian women constructed in the U.S. that viewed them as "immoral women who deceived U.S. men into marriage." For instance, when a middle-class Japanese wife of U.S. man was asked if she married her white U.S. husband for a green card, she deflected by saying, "People from countries such as the Philippines and Thailand may be dying to get a green card […] But Japan is not a country like that" (Moriizumi 2011:96). Such comment illustrated the ethnic differentiation and power of political economy in the othering process when the Japanese wife tried to distinguish her identity from other Asian women that she perceived as coming from countries poorer than Japan, while internalizing and engaging in the narratives that disparaged Asian brides from those countries at the same time. However, scholars who study cross-national marriages have yet to devote attention to the processes in which women from poorer countries try to resist, negotiate, deflect, or even conform to the stereotypes imposed on them in their identity construction.

In Chapter 4, I discussed that some Americans viewed Thai wives of white men either positively (as good cook and devoted housewife) or negatively (as utilizing marriage to obtain a green card or deceive white U.S. men for their money). I provided evidence that these narratives were not true for many Thai wives. Given these narratives

of Asian women's cross-national marriage to white U.S. men either as "immoral women" or "subservient wives," in this chapter, I offered evidence that Thai immigrant wives did make efforts to construct, conform to, and negotiate their identities in relation to these stereotyped images. They fashioned their racial, gender, and class identities in relation to larger societal structures that oppressed them. This chapter examined how Thai wives who are married to white U.S. men dealt with the dominant discourses that circulate about them and their relationships with their husbands.

Drawing on this dynamic, this chapter examines how class divisions, race and gender, shape intraethnic othering process among Thai immigrant wives of white U.S. men. My approach is inspired by the studies of intraethnic othering and internalized racial oppression, in which members of racially subordinated groups inculcate an oppressive view from the dominant racist society toward their own group and start to affirm negative stereotypes of other members of their group (Pyke and Dang 2003; Pyke 2010a, 2010b). I asked the following questions: How do Thai wives cope with or manage these stereotypes? What are the dynamics that Thai wives employ in resisting, deflecting, or negotiating with the racist and sexist stereotypes? Do they rely on the negative stereotypes imposed on other members of their racial/ethnic group in constructing their femininity? Do they construct their femininity in relation to other Thai wives and/or women from other racial/ethnic groups (e.g., white U.S. women)? Do they use their social and cultural capital (e.g., class status or educational credentials) to distance themselves from coethnic women who seem to perpetuate the negative stereotyped

images of Asian foreign bride? My analysis will consider these dynamics in the intraethnic othering process.

Data and Method

This study consists of interviews with 38 Thai wives of white U.S. men from the previous chapters (for more details about sample selection, the rationale of sampling and eligibility criteria, see Chapter 2). This chapter primarily focused on how Thai wives of white U.S. men responded to certain stereotypes about them being a Thai wife of white U.S. man. I asked the respondents to describe their life stories, work, daily interactions with other people in the U.S., such as husbands' family members, colleagues, coworkers, friends, neighbors, and strangers. These people included Thais in the U.S. I asked about things people say to them upon knowing they are Thai wives of white U.S. men and the locations and specific events where these interactions occur. I paid particular attention to respondents' preconceived ideas about their status as a "*mia farang*" and the ways that they interpreted how other people treat them in particular situations. I presented these dynamics in Chapter 4. In this chapter, I further examined on the dynamics when some respondents described different treatment from people they interacted with or when someone had certain stereotypical expectations of them, and I asked respondents to describe how they coped with and responded to those situations. For example, I asked about things they do to correct other people's assumptions about themselves in different situations. I allowed the respondents to freely describe how they reacted when people treated them differently.

I read the transcribed interviews several times and, using codes, identified recurring themes on their reactions regarding biases or different treatment from other people in the U.S. and in Thailand when they were visiting home. Although several respondents said that their responses were often doing nothing or "letting it go," the theme concerning differentiation among Thai wives and othering processes emerged frequently from the interview data. Thus, my analysis focused on these othering dynamics. I used the interview data to describe the ways that some respondents blamed the negative stereotypes of foreign Asian wives as global gold-diggers constructed in the U.S. discourse and the stereotype of Thai wives as former prostitutes constructed in Thailand as true of other Thai wives, but not true of them. Even though several respondents (28 of 38) said that they never encountered direct biases from anyone in the U.S., more than half of respondents (25 of 38) still relied on these negative stereotypes in constructing their identities and deflecting from these images. This theme was noticeable enough to justify my investigation. However, this was not to suggest that the majority of Thai wives employed these strategies in coping with negative stereotypes. My purpose was to illustrate how intraethnic othering occurred in the construction and negotiation of identity for Thai immigrant wives in the U.S. The first and second themes focused on the urban-rural divide and ethnic differentiation in Thailand. I found a tendency for some respondents to invoke class and ethnic distinctions between the rural poor and urban middle-class, with the urban middle-class identity as a safe, non-stigmatized identity and the rural poor (e.g., Isan) as a stigmatized one. These two strategies involved using their privileged position to distance themselves from lower-class coethnics whom they

associated with stereotypes like gold-diggers and uncouth rural women. The third theme focused on the ways that some respondents constructed a form of femininity that pertained to traditional heteronormative gender arrangements and claimed to represent "true womanhood" in relation to the perceived notions they had about femininity associated with white U.S. women. In the sections that follow, I presented quotes from the interview data to illustrate patterns of coping strategies and I used pseudonyms to identify respondents

Findings

Distancing from Gold-Diggers: "I Didn't Marry a White Man to be Financially Secure"

When asked what kinds of ideas they have about Thai women dating or marrying white men, several Thai wives (25 of 38) invoked a stereotype of "*mia farang*s" – Thai wives of white men – as marrying out of economic security. They suggested that this stereotype was true of other impoverished Thai women, but not true of them. Some respondents who come from middle-class families or earned a bachelor's or higher degrees drew on their own educational credential, economic capitals, and professional status to identify as middle-class and distance themselves from the stereotyped images of women marrying out of money. In describing the process by which they came to be married to white American men, some respondents asserted that they did not follow the pattern associated with those *mia farang*s who aimed to secure a marriage to a white man for upward mobility. In response to this narrative, respondents said something such as, "I didn't plan to marry a white man," "I came to study not to marry," "I did not feel like I needed to marry a white man to be financially secure." They asserted that they married

white men by accident, not design, and out of love, not money. For instance, Kai, a 42-year-old Thai wife who has a master's degree in business in a U.S. university, stated:

> I had never thought about marrying a white man before. [I'm] **not some women who pursued only white boyfriends**. I came here to study. I am educated and can depend on myself. I had no expectations that I would have a better life, that white husbands must be rich, or that I would be able to send lot of money back home. Those kinds of things never cross my mind. I didn't grow up with the idea that "what would I get from marrying a white man?" That was not me. (emphasis added)

Contrary to the assumption of Kai and other respondents, it is not the case that middle-or upper-class women heterosexually partner only for love, and not money. Marriage has always been a way of raising capital, constructing political power, transferring property, occupational status, and personal contacts across generations (Coontz 2004). Upper- and middle-class women and men are also concerned about economic benefits when deciding whom to marry. Still, several respondents emphasized their education and middle-classness in their narrative accounts, suggesting that money was not a concern as they were secure economically. They did so to distance themselves from stereotypes of *mia farang* as uneducated poor women seeking to marry a white man for money. In distancing from such stereotypes, these respondents suggest stereotypes are true, but simply not true of them.

College-educated respondents also employed their occupational prestige (either from their previous or current jobs) to contrast with the stereotyped images of *mia farang*

as irresponsible, lazy, and spendthrift women. For example, Karn, a 46-year-old registered nurse and wife of a 70-year-old retired lawyer, told me that she never feels embarrassed when telling other people what she does for a living. She said:

> I never feel that Americans look down on me. I don't know…maybe they have some ideas about Asian or Thai women married to a white man being economically dependent. But once they learn that I'm a nurse, or when we have a conversation for a while, I think they can tell who I am. [Interviewer: What do you mean by who you are?] I mean, they probably can tell that I'm educated. I use formal English. I don't use street slang. I can advise them about health issues. I feel that they are impressed with me as a person who came from a small country overseas… that I'm a hard-working person **because there are some *mia farangs* who don't want to do anything, they just want to stay home, shop, and play cards. I'm not like that.** My husband is very proud about me being a nurse, and he always brags about it to his friends. (emphasis added)

Some respondents did not view all *mia farangs* as necessarily poor, but rather constructed them as women who have a strong desire to marry white men because of the assumption about white men as capable of providing wealth and opportunities to pursue an affluent lifestyle due to the income disparity between the richer and poorer countries (see Chapter 3). They claimed that they knew some Thai wives who were not poor but utilized marriage with U.S. men primarily in exchange for perceived benefits such as

resident status or financial support. For example, Jean, a 37-year-old former banker who came to earn a master's degree in business in the U.S., explained:

> I think I came here [to the U.S.] **rightfully** and I met and married my husband **lawfully**. I was not the kind of woman who enrolled in a language school so as to find a white man to marry. I did not plan to marry for resident status. I knew many people who did something like that, they came here four years and enrolled in a language school so that they could work [illegally] in Thai restaurants. Who would enroll in a language school for four years? **Some people came to the U.S. as an au pair or on a tourist visa, met a white man for only three months and married without knowing him well**. Some people might just think that marrying white men is a solution, that they will have a better life, nice house, nice car and so on. (emphases and text in brackets added)

Some respondents internalized the discourse of the American Dream, assuming that success is based on merit and if one works hard enough, they can be successful. They described gold-digging *mia farang*s as lazy and dependent solely on their husbands, while distancing themselves from the stereotype using their jobs and self-earnings. For example, Kate, another 45-year-old registered nurse told me that she never asked her husband for money even when she first arrived the U.S. and could not find a job in the first few months.

> [In Thailand] I used to work seven days a week. I used to have my own income. When I moved here I had no jobs in the first few months and had

to start over. I had my savings from before I quit my job of around 500,000 baht [about $15,000], so I used that money for my personal expenses during the first few months, including paying my home mortgage in Thailand. I never asked my husband for money, although he always paid when we ate out and for groceries.

Kate asserted that she pulled herself up by her bootstraps. Kate found her first job as a waitress in a Thai restaurant and worked for five years in several low-wage part-time jobs such as a babysitter, elder caregiver, and dog walker before she passed the licensed test to become a registered nurse in the U.S. She told me that she did everything that made money so as to be financially independent.

I thought that it wasn't right to just sit at home and ask money from my husband. One time, an elderly white female client whom I took care of told me that she did not understand why some American men marry "alien" wives because they don't work, and they are lazy. But she complimented me that I was the first one that she personally knew who worked. What she said made me think that perhaps most Americans view foreign wives as dependent and helpless women**. And I think it's true because I have seen it from other Thai wives who invited me to a party at their houses. They were housewives. They did nothing but shopping and playing cards.** One of them asked me if she could hide at my house an expensive brand name bag she secretly bought from a store

because she did not want her husband to find out what she spent his money on. (emphasis added)

More than half of respondents from all educational backgrounds (20 of 38), all of whom have worked in the U.S., distanced themselves from the stereotypes by making distinctions between them and other *mia farangs*. Drawing on notions such as classism and meritocracy, they defined the good *mia farang* by their capabilities to be economically independent, and the bad *mia farang* by their laziness, extravagance, and dependency. This internal boundary differentiation is a form of a defensive othering process (Schwalbe et al. 2000) in which members of a subordinate group internalize and accept the legitimacy of the negative stereotype imposed on members of their group by the dominant group, believing the stereotype is true, but not true of them. The constructed differentiation between the good and the bad *mia farang* allows some respondents to maintain a sense of differences within group and deflect the negative stereotype associated with the group that they belong to. The examples illustrated here showed that the stereotyped images of Thai immigrant wives of white U.S. men as lazy gold-diggers were not only constructed by Americans in the U.S., but also reproduced by Thai wives of white U.S. men, who accepted such derogatory images and sought to deflect them.

Distancing from the Lower-Class, Poor-Mannered Women: The Narratives of Lack

To distance themselves from the negative images of *mia farang*s, some respondents (11 of 38) asserted the class differences among Thais and constructed a self-identity as refined and sophisticated – an image associated with cosmopolitan, modern middle-class women, while reiterating the images of other *mia farang*s as ostensibly

lacking manners, knowledge, and taste – a characteristic associated with rural lower-class women. For example, Minnie, a 45-year-old Thai wife who had an MBA degree from an American university, disassociated herself from other *mia farang*s by criticizing them for their lower-class uncouth behaviors. When I asked about her involvement at the Thai temple she visited, she relied heavily on the class difference among *mia farang*s in constructing her identity as middle-class:

> [Interviewer: Do you have any friends who are Thai women married to white men at the temple?] I took my daughter to study Thai language at [Sunday school at] the temple only, but I don't like socializing with other *mia farang*s because they usually came from different…places, different societies [from me]. Some of them were cooks, or rural women. If I lived in Thailand, I would not hang out with them. I'm not going to hang out with them just because we are *mia farang*s. […] I prefer to socialize with Japanese and Korean wives whom I have known since I moved here. They have less drama. [Interviewer: What kinds of things that you don't like about *mia farang*s?] Like when they knew I was going to visit Thailand, they would ask me to buy things [from Thailand] for them or carry gifts for their relatives in Thailand. We were not even close. They never asked if my baggage was already packed or heavy. I think they were very selfish. [Interviewer: So, you talked to them?] Yes, just small talk during my daughter's study hours…but if I could avoid them, I would.

As *mia farang*s varied in their class backgrounds, it was common that they associated with those of the same class status. However, it was noteworthy that when asked to describe *mia farang*s they know, almost half of the respondents from middle-class and upper-middle-class families (11 of 24) implied indirectly that they would not associate with other *mia farang*s because they perceived that most *mia farang*s were lower-class women, while none of the respondents from lower-class families made such comments.

For instance, Jean, a 37-year-old housewife who was a banker in Thailand and MBA graduate from a university in the U.S., made the following comments about *mia farang*s she met at Thai temple:

> Having met Thai people here, I was glad at first. It was like an emotional comfort. You know, we live far from our homeland. But after a while, I realized that ***mia farang*s I knew came from different backgrounds** and our lifestyles were not compatible. [Interviewer: What do you mean by not compatible?] Like… **somebody stole things** when going to someone's house. When they saw something nice, they just took it without telling the host. You know, **not everyone came from a good family**. **Some people were struggling to make ends meet.** (emphasis added)

Although Jean did not directly say that *mia farang*s who stole were from lower-class, she implied that they were economically poor by saying that they "came from different backgrounds" and "were struggling to make ends meet." Jean further stated that after witnessing someone stole, she was very selective in choosing *mia farang* friends.

She only associated with *mia farang*s who "were educated," believing that educated people do not steal. Jean told me that this strategy had a backlash on her as she heard of someone gossiped about her, saying that she only hung out with rich people. I noticed that Jean conflated *mia farang*s who were educated with those who were rich, which perhaps suggested that she viewed them as belonging to the same social group. She rebutted by saying that money was not her main concern in socializing with someone, but it was about their perceived worldviews. She stated:

> For example, I wanted to discuss my son's educational pathways to become a doctor with someone. But some [Thai] women were uneducated and unmotivated to improve themselves. Some women had a truck driver husband. Do you think they will value education? When these women got together, do you know what they talked about? They talked about shopping and showing off brand-name stuffs. It's about their attitudes. I could not say that we were on the same page. I'd rather talk to my husband than these women.

Class distinction is an important issue to take into consideration when analyzing *mia farang*s' experiences within a Thai community in the U.S. While the dominant U.S. discourse homogenously portrays them as impoverished wives of U.S. military men or as "mail-order brides" (Hidalgo and Bankston 2001), *mia farang*s, in fact, vary in socioeconomic status, education, and class backgrounds. Thus, middle-class respondents relied on these differences when talking about themselves as *mia farang*s. For instance, Jean from the previous excerpt earned an MBA from a university in the U.S. which not

many *mia farang*s could attain. She saw herself as different from them in terms of cultural capital – class-based knowledge and a worldview that are passed on via family and related on educational attainment (Bourdieu 1984). As the conceptions of class are not limited to purely economic, but also to social and cultural arenas, Jean believed that other *mia farang*s she knew came from less privileged backgrounds than herself, hence were simple-minded, and lacked the ability to fully understand sophisticated topics, such as how to help their children pursue medical school. She cited lack of education and lack of manners as examples of the negative images of *mia farang*s that she did not share, and she used it to emphasize her superiority over lower-class *mia farang*s.

Intraethnic class difference plays an important role in shaping the way that respondents socially distance themselves from other *mia farang*s. Ten respondents (10 of 38) said they avoided associating with other *mia farang*s because they believed that they were more prone to have financial problems than Americans. Some had experiences with the *mia farang*s who borrowed their money and never paid it back, so they had better avoid all of them. Sometimes, social distancing does not mean only physical isolation, but also the highlight on the narratives of "lack" (Lawler 2005). When the respondents described what *mia farang*s, they not only talked about a lack of economic resources, but also a lack of "taste, knowledge, and the right ways of being and doing" (Bourdieu 1984). For instance, some respondents commented that they were disturbed when seeing lower-class *mia farang*s conducted inappropriate behaviors. They relied on the class difference in their critiques of such behaviors. For example, Joy, a 45-year-old and former high

school teacher in Thailand, recalled when she was invited to a social gathering with several *mia farang*s. She stated:

> Some Thai wives that I knew had little education. **Most of them were Isan women**. **They had only four years of education in school, and the only thing they knew before they came to the U.S. was rice farming.** I don't discriminate against people because of their class. I don't mind mingling with them, **but some women looked down on these women**. There was a woman who had a master's degree in architecture. She once asked me how I socialize with such low-educated people. Her white U.S. husband was also a rich architect, but they don't have any kids. One day when we had a baby shower at someone's house, one former bargirl Thai wife, who had kind of lacked discipline, abruptly said to this woman, "You should have sex with your husband more often [so that you could have a child]" And just like that, this architect woman walked away and never joined any of our social gatherings again. (emphasis and text in brackets added)

Respondents who socialized with lower-class *mia farang*s in their everyday lives engaged the othering process on the basis of class when interacting with other Thais as well, though not as direct as those who said they avoided associating with other *mia farang*s. For example, when asked what kinds of *mia farang*s she preferred to socialize with, Em, a 50-year-old and former high school teacher in Thailand, commented:

I prefer people who are optimistic and don't gossip about others. I don't care if they are rich or poor, but **I don't like people who are big-mouthed and foul-mouthed**…only few people were like that. When I lived in [a state in the U.S.], they mostly were bargirls who came from rural area [of Thailand] and liked to get together and gossip other people. These women invited me to a party, but I always politely declined. It's not that I looked down on them. **I never thought that they were inferior**; **I just didn't like hearing them using bad languages**. (emphasis and text in brackets added)

It was not only middle-class respondents who distanced themselves from inappropriate behaviors associated with lower-class *mia farang*s, some respondents from lower-class families also asserted a similar idea when describing how they felt when being around *mia farang* friends. For example, Mai, a 43-year-old housewife who had only nine years of formal education, stated:

Some women are normal. They are okay. But some women, who come from not-very-good families…I don't like hanging out with them. **I know I have little education too, but I never talked like those women.** They cursed and used foul language a lot. When these women gathered at someone's house, they would gossip about other *mia farang*s behind their backs. When I was there, I felt it wasn't right. (emphasis added)

For several respondents, bad manners and lack of refinement are characteristics that are stigmatized because they mark those who associated with them as members of an

inferior social class to the person making the judgment. In other words, lower-class and rural *mia farang*s who are accused of lacking refinement are perceived to lack of what Bourdieu (1984) called "cultural capital" – the accumulation of class-based knowledge acquired through education and slow inculcation, which identifies those who have it as a member of the dominant social group (Mitchie and Bernsteine 2009). By highlighting the class difference within the group of *mia farang*s and attributing the negative images of *mia farang*s to merely lower-class Thai women, some respondents believed that they could assert their middle-class identities and dismiss lower-class *mia farang*s as representatives of their groups to the larger public eyes. However, it was not clear how this strategy worked in actual social interactions because most respondents did not specifically describe how they emphasized their middle-class status when interacting with others (especially Americans), or how they tried to convey their class status to others that they were not lower-class *mia farang*s. As I discussed in Chapter 4, several Thai wives from middle-class families still encountered negative stereotypes of *mia farang*s from Americans and Thais in the contexts where their socioeconomic statuses were not recognized. Moreover, by deflecting the negative images of *mia farang*s to only lower-class women, the racial and gendered images of *mia farang* are still maintained and reproduced. The limitation of this strategy was that the social distancing described by the respondents was merely an identity work that did not change or undermine a devalued identity about members of their group on the basis of their race and gender.

Emphasizing Racialized Femininities: "White Women Do Not Cook."

Some respondents (11 of 38) confirmed certain gendered racial stereotype that people had about them when they perceived such stereotypes as positive. Specifically, they believed in the assumption that Thai wives are good cooks and make better wives than white U.S. women who are allegedly career-oriented and unskilled in domesticity. In so doing, some respondents fostered the heteronormative gender arrangements involving the dominance of men over women in the household. For example, when I asked Sarika, a 50-year-old housewife, about what kinds of things she liked about her white U.S. husband, she changed the topic by talking about white U.S. women whom she viewed as too career-oriented and busy to take care of housework. She stated:

> It's less about what I liked about him, but more about why he liked me and did not choose white women. Do you know why Thai women are popular among white men? **It's because they don't have women like us here** [in the U.S.]. White [U.S.] women only think about their work…like modern women. When they were busy working, they let their husbands buy their own food every day. That's why many people get divorced these days. Thai women are sweet and know how to cook. **We take care of men and please men**. When two people get married, they should take care for each other. Husband's job is making money and wife takes care of household. That's the way a family should be. (emphasis and text in brackets added)

Sarika not only endorsed and conformed to the heteronormative gender arrangements, she also saw these arrangements through a racialized lens. She constructed

two types of femininities as racially distinct, with white femininity regarded as career-oriented, independent and self-centered, while Thai femininity regarded as caring and family-oriented – in other word, a better form of femininity. In another example, Em, a 50-year-old housewife, constructed Thai femininity in juxtaposition to white U.S. women, whom she viewed as lacking skills in domestic domain. She stated:

> I think that Thai women make good housewives. We can cook, and we can give massage to our husbands when they come back from work and are tired. We know how to compromise when husbands are grumpy. **These characteristics are something that white women lack**. (emphasis added)

The juxtaposition between Thai wives and white U.S. women was a common theme among some respondents. As shown in Em's comment, she constructed white U.S. wives as the opposites of submissive and docile Thai wives, and described women's personality traits by their race, while overlooking variations within racial groups that there are Thai wives who are assertive and do not like cooking as well (for example, Wassana from Chapter 4). There are also white U.S. women who are good at cooking and household chores. There was a tendency to view and categorize gender behaviors through a racialized lens even when such behaviors contradicted their racialized notions of gender. For example, when asked to describe her relationship with her mother-in-law, Angel, a 34-year-old waitress, stated:

> She is a sweet and soft-spoken woman. When she comes visit, she will do laundry for me and my husband every time she sees our dirty clothes in the basket. She will fold them neatly. I have to ask her not to do it, but she

does it anyway. **She's like a Thai**. She takes care of us when she comes

by. (emphasis added)

Angel's accounts built on the assumption that white U.S. women were perceived to be assertive and lack of domestic skills. Hence, when her mother-in-law's personalities did not comply with her notion of racialized gender about white U.S. women, Angel described her mother-in-law's personalities in racialized ways that she was "like a Thai." This example illustrated how the racialization of gender governed Angel's worldview about gender practices. When describing her mother-in-law as a caring and domestic-oriented person, Angel did not consider variations of individuals within a white racial group. Instead, she relied on racialized gender stereotypes of Thai women and used a racial term to describe her mother-in-law. In Angel's view, being sweet, kind, soft-spoken, and domestic-oriented were racialized as Thai femininity.

For some respondents, being incompetent in domesticity marked white U.S. femininity, while being good at it marked Thai femininity. For example, May, a 32-year-old housewife, dichotomized domestic competence and incompetence in racialized terms by invoking racial stereotypes about Thai and white women. She stated:

I think my mother-in-law likes me because I please her every time she comes visit. I like cleaning and cooking. **I think it's a charm of Thai women to be able to perform these roles perfectly.** My mother-in-law likes Thai food. **And I think white women do not cook**. **Because I usually saw them buy junk food for their husband and children.** (emphasis added)

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Some respondents reiterated the idea that "white women do not cook," and drew on skills and practices in domestic domain to glorify the virtues of Thai women as better wives and mothers than white U.S. women. For instance, Ratana, a 45-year-old jeweler, criticized the ways her husband's ex-wife, a white American, took care of her husband's children when they spent time at the ex-wife's house. She commented:

> I knew that she never cooked. She just bought ready-to-eat chicken or frozen food from a store, put it in the fridge, and let her kids microwaved it themselves. When they were with me, I cooked for them three meals a day. I did a better job than their own mom.

For some respondents, Thai wives and white U.S. wives are constructed as opposites in terms of gender performances. They did not construct Thai femininity as inferior to white U.S. femininity, but rather the femininity possessed by "good" wives. They utilized these racial distinctions in reproducing the notion of heteronormative gender arrangements in the household, rendering Thai women as better wives and mothers than white U.S. women. However, this racialization of gender serves the interests of the male domination as their white U.S. husbands benefit the most from it. When the respondents constructed their femininity, as domestic-oriented housewives, in juxtaposition to their perception of white U.S. femininity, their femininity is still constructed in the context of the overall subordination of women to men in household.

Conclusion

This chapter expanded the discussion on cross-national marriages between Thai immigrant wives and white U.S. men by examining how Thai immigrant wives engaged the strategies to manage and cope with the racial and gender stereotypes imposed upon them. Much of the discussion on non-U.S., non-Western wives of white US. men had often cited women in need of economic security or U.S. legal status as the major motives in international marriage and led to a negative image of immoral or opportunistic women (Kim 2010). I also provided evidence of the racial and gendered stereotypes that Thai wives of white U.S. men encountered in the U.S. and Thailand when they were visiting home in Chapter 4. This chapter examined how Thai wives responded to such stereotypes.

First, I examined variations within ethnic groups and demonstrated that some Thai wives of white U.S. men engaged the intraethnic othering process by distancing themselves from other Thai wives on the basis of class. Some respondents highlighted their middle-classness from their educational and occupational prestige to make distinctions between them and other *mia farangs*. At the same time, they perpetuated the racial gendered stereotypes of *mia farang*s as marrying white U.S. men for economic security or U.S. legal status as true of some women, but simply not true of them. This dynamic allowed us insight into the class biases that intersect with racial and gendered assumptions in creating the "matrix of domination" (Collins 2000). The presence of the stereotyped images of opportunistic and impoverished *mia farang*s, who utilized international marriage with white U.S. men to obtain economic security or U.S. legal

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status, was justified by defining those who fit the images as an "immoral" group. Although some respondents stated that the stereotypes were not true of all *mia farang*s, they could point to someone who fell into this group. Furthermore, by labeling some *mia farang*s as immoral poor who lacked taste, knowledge, and the right ways of doing things (Lawler 2005), some respondents could assert their class and moral superiority over other *mia farang*s. Also, this intraethnic othering strategy on the basis of class provided a means to invalidate the speakers from the negative images of *mia farang*, but the racial and gendered stereotypes of *mia farang* are still maintained in the dominant discourse. In other word, they inculcated a racist, and sexist view from the dominant discourse toward their coethnic women, and affirmed the negative stereotypes of imposed upon other members of their group (Pyke and Dang 2003; Pyke 2010b). This dynamic demonstrates how the gender racial stereotypes of *mia farang*s are reproduced in cross-national marriages between Thai women and white Western men.

I also provided examples of how Thai wives of white U.S. men utilized racialized femininity in constructing their identities as superior to white U.S. women in performing the heteronormative gender arrangements in the household. Respondents racialized and nationalized gender behaviors in a dichotomous way without considering variations among racial groups. Contrary to Asian-American women from other studies (Pyke and Johnson 2003; Nemoto 2009) who viewed assertiveness, independence and self-confidence associated with white U.S. women as superior to Asian femininity characterized by submissive demeanor, some respondents cast white U.S. women as incompetent in domesticity. They also presented themselves as "good" women by

subscribing to the heteronormative gender norms in their marriage with white U.S. men, believing that they made better wives than white U.S. women. Although this strategy allowed respondents to boost their sense of self-worth as Thai women and deflect the negative stereotypes of foreign wives who married to white U.S. men, it still maintained and reproduced the complicity with the logic of white male dominance.

Although most respondents were aware of the sexist and racist stereotypes of foreign Asian wives of white U.S. men and attempted to deflect them by highlighting the differences between them and other *mia farang*s and white U.S. women, they did not critically challenge the stereotypes, nor they view male dominance as an issue in their marriages. The consequences of utilizing these strategies demonstrate the intersecting nature of the structure of oppression. When some respondents employed class difference to distance themselves from other *mia farang*s, they helped promote he legitimacy of the devalued identity imposed on their coethnic women. That is, class oppression can beget internalized racial oppression. When some respondents employed racialized femininity in creating a positive self-identity of the "good wives" to cope with the racist assumption about foreign Asian wives in the U.S., they conformed to heteronormative gender arrangements that reproduce the image of subservient Asian wives who are willing to please their white U.S. husbands. Hence, the strategy that *resists one form of oppression* may be trapped into reinforcing the other.

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Chapter 6:

Conclusion

In this concluding chapter, I will summarize how the intersectionality as a theoretical framework informed this study, and how it helped us understand the interlocking systems of oppression, such as race, class, and gender, that shaped experiences of inequalities for Thai immigrant wives of white U.S. men in their everyday interactions. Also, I address some research questions that I have not yet explored and future directions to expand the discussion on cross-national marriages.

The U.S. dominant discourse negatively shaped the images of heterosexual non-U.S., non-Western wives of U.S. men since the early days of colonialism (Tsunokai et al. 2013). Foreign-born Asian wives were frequently depicted as immoral women, sometimes as former prostitutes, who sought to deceive and go after white U.S. men's wealth, or as being "lotus blossoms," who were submissive, exotic, or sexually available for men (Yuh 2002; Zare 2011). However, when it comes to cross-national interracial marriage, the prevailing stereotypes of Asian women as subservient and willing to please their husbands still make them highly desirable romantic partners for white heterosexual men. The dynamics in which foreign-born Thai women marry white U.S. men at greater rate compared to foreign-born Thai women who marry Thai men or Asian men in the U.S. reflect the interwoven complexity of race, gender, and class that inform their marriages. Traditional migration scholars gravitated toward an economic explanation when analyzing cross-racial international marriages. That is, non-Western women's main

reason for pursuing a husband abroad was economic security, assuming that white Western men were all economically well-off, and women were poorer (Kim 2010; Hidalgo and Bankston. 2011). Feminist scholars turned away from economic explanations and argued that they were patriarchal practices and authoritarian coethnic men in the homeland that non-Western women sought to avoid (Kelsky 2001; Hirakawa 2004), while critical race and intersectional scholars highlighted the existence of a racial/ethnic hierarchy and racial stereotypes that produced white privilege and dissuade heterosexual non-white women from regarding coethnic men as desirable partners, and turn their gaze to white men (Pyke 2010a). My purpose was to integrate these arguments so as to understand Thai immigrant wives' experiences within the intersecting structural constraints. I also examined how the prevailing stereotypes of foreign Asian wives affect them in everyday lives and how they managed and coped with the racist and sexist assumptions imposed on them by people in the U.S., and in Thailand when they were visiting home.

Chapter 3 was a response to feminist academic arguments that cast non-white, non-Western women who participated in cross-racial international marriages with white Western men as strategically engaging white hegemonic masculinity to resist the so-called "ethnic masculinity (Kelsky 2001; Hirakawa 2004; Schaeffer-Grabiel 2004; Nemoto 2009), while assuming that white Western men are less patriarchal and authoritarian. I employed an intersectional framework in critically analyzing how Thai immigrant wives of white U.S. men constructed and internalized positive views about white Western masculinity long before they met their husbands. The findings suggested

that respondents directed their "internalized racial oppression" (Pyke 2010a) onto Thai men, and rendered them undesirable romantic partners and spouses. On the other hand, through a racialized lens, they idealized some masculine traits and linked such traits to white hegemonic masculinity. Such generalization of white masculinity made them more easily available to white heterosexual men and prone to marry white U.S. men. The findings suggested that the resistance of one form of oppression (e.g., gender oppression) can rely on the reproduction of other forms of oppression (e.g., racism) and, thus we should not quickly interpret cross-racial international marriage as a strategy that non-white, non-Western women employ to resist gender oppression of their homeland or coethnic men, provided that their perceptions were informed by internalized racial oppression.

Chapter 4 shed light on Thai wives of white men's experiences with racial and gender stereotypes. The findings identified the types and dynamics of stereotypes and revealed that biases about *mia farang*s are prevalent both in the U.S. and Thailand. Using an intersectional theoretical framework (Collins 2000), the findings indicated that while some respondents experienced racial and gender biases, their class statuses (measured by education and occupational prestige) may contribute to different treatments from their husbands' friends and families. However, their race, gender, and foreign signifiers (e.g., accent) still penalized them when interacting with strangers. While racist and sexist beliefs were prevalent in the larger society in both the U.S. and Thailand, respondents still held beliefs about heteronormative gender arrangements that if they performed well in the role of wife, according to others' expectations, the racial and gender biases would

disappear. However, the expectations to perform well in their conjugal family sometimes contradicted the expectations of their natal family.

In Chapter 5, I examined the ways in which the Thai wives of white U.S. men manage and cope with the stereotypes of being a *mia farang*. The findings identified three strategies they responded to the public's perceptions of *mia farang*s. Respondents presented information that could foster positive impressions from others. In so doing, they engaged the intraethnic othering process by inculcating an oppressive racial and gender stereotype from the dominant discourse toward the group of *mia farang*s, and distancing themselves from other *mia farang*s on the basis of class. This class distancing demonstrated how class oppression and internalized racial oppression operate simultaneously (Pyke 2010b). Class distancing among *mia farang*s occurred in two forms. First, respondents highlighted their middle-classness by suggesting that money was not their concerns as they were secure economically. They did so to distance themselves from stereotypes of *mia farang* as uneducated poor women seeking to marry a white man for money. Second, they employed the "narratives of lack" (Lawler 2005) in distancing themselves from other lower-class *mia farang*s. They described other lower-class *mia farang*s as lacking taste, knowledge, and manners. By highlighting the class difference within the group of *mia farang*s and attributing the negative images of *mia farang*s to merely lower-class Thai women, some respondents believed that they could dismiss lower-class *mia farang*s as representatives of their groups to the public's perceptions. The third strategy involved the construction and redefinition of racialized femininities. Through a racialized lens, respondents presented themselves as "good Thai

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wives" who conformed to the notion of heteronormative gender arrangements and countered hegemonic white femininity by critiquing white U.S. women for their lack of skills in domesticity. Attempting to deflect negative stereotypes of foreign Asian wives, respondents constructed a positive self-identity in racialized terms and reproduced the image of subservient Asian wives who took good care of their white U.S. husbands. The findings illustrated how femininities were racialized and served to reproduce the male dominance structure along the way.

Contributions of This Dissertation

This dissertation accomplished its two primary objectives. First, it shed light on the stereotypes of Thai immigrant wives in the U.S. by exploring who they are and the diversity within these groups. My study highlighted that these women varied in their social class status, educational backgrounds, occupations, ethnicity, location in their life-courses, and the ways they met their husbands. This study offered an examination of how the interplay between race, class, ethnicity, and gender informed different experiences in cross-racial international heterosexual marriages. I examined various aspects of their marriage migration experiences, which revised misconceptions about the motives of Thai immigrant wives in international marriages. Hence, scholars should not treat non-white, non-Western immigrant wives of the same country as a homogenized group when they are very diverse regarding education, occupations, and ethnicity. Rather, scholars should address them as individuals to understand their experiences.

Second, this dissertation added to the understandings of intersectionality in international marriages. This dissertation highlighted the complexity of the "matrix of

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domination" in the way that the resistance of one form of oppression (e.g., gender oppression) can rely on the reproduction of other forms of oppression (e.g., racism). Chapter 3 illustrated how white Western masculinity was employed in justifying in their marriages with white U.S. men. The findings suggested that scholars should not quickly interpret cross-racial international marriage as a strategy that Thai women employ to resist gender oppression of their homeland or coethnic men, especially when their perceptions are informed by oppressive racial ideologies that denigrate coethnic men as inferior to white Western men. Chapter 4 and 5 examined the stereotypes placed upon them by the dominant discourses and strategies that Thai wives engage in coping and responding to such stereotypes. The findings illustrated the powerful interplay of systems of oppression based on gender, race, and class in perpetuating the racialized and gendered images of Thai wives of white U.S. men. When some respondents employed social class to distance themselves from the negative images, they helped promote the legitimacy of the devalued identity imposed on their coethnics. When some respondents resisted one form of oppression, it could also reproduce another form of racial and gender oppression. The construction of racialized femininity of Thai wives as dedicating wives and mothers might help some respondents feel good about themselves, but it still reproduced male domination over female in conjugal relationships. These dynamics proved that the interconnected forms of structural oppression are difficult to escape from. This study cautioned that what might look like as resisting a form of oppression can, in turn, result in reproduction of other forms of oppression, when examined through a lens of

intersectionality. Scholars need to consider the interconnections between each structural oppression within this matrix of domination.

Limitations and Future Directions

This dissertation is far from being perfect. There are several questions that I have not yet explored in cross-racial international marriages between Thai women and white U.S. men. First, I did not adequately examine the power dynamics in respondents' marital relations. I did not sufficiently analyze how the respondents' class statuses, education, and occupational prestige affect their relationships with their husbands. The samples are overwhelming part-time workers or housewives (21 of 38) with only five respondents who work or used to work in science and technological fields which are predominantly male domains. Moreover, this study consisted of only five Thai wives who worked in academic, science and technological fields. Future research might explore how the racial and gender biases about Thai immigrant wives are mediated by their occupations. Furthermore, future research might include more immigrant wives with high education and a prestigious career to explore how these forms of privilege may potentially counter-interact with racial and gender bias of foreign-born wives of white U.S. men.

There were some shortcomings in the methodology due to difficulties in recruiting the respondents. This study did not control the years of immigration and years of marriage. Therefore, the experiences between respondents who lived in the U.S. and married longer and those who recently arrived or married may differ, even though I made the research criteria that they have lived and married in the U.S. more than three years. I also did not control the numbers of marriage. Some respondents divorced a white U.S.

man and married a different white U.S. man. Thus, their perceptions on racialized masculinity might be different from respondents who are married to only one white U.S. man. This was due partly to the nature of methodology employed in this dissertation. As usual in the case of interview, I examined small groups of respondents for a relatively short period of time in comparison to longitudinal quantitative studies.

Furthermore, this study relied solely on the Thai immigrant wives' accounts because it was impossible for me to observe their experiences firsthand. Unfortunately, I did not have enough times and resources to follow the respondents and conduct ethnography on their everyday lives. Future research can be carried out through either multi-sited ethnographies or a longitudinal study.

Finally, due to my inability to recruit and interview respondents' white U.S. husbands, this dissertation lacked the perspective of white U.S. men. Future research that can incorporate the narrative accounts of white U.S. men who married Thai immigrant women to explore whether they draw on assumptions about racial, gender, or class differences to explain their marriages with Thai immigrant wives and the ways relationships with their wives play out. Do white U.S. men describe their Thai immigrant wives and relationships with them in the same ways that the wives described? I believe that future research can complete the questions left unanswered.

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Appendix

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, RIVERSIDE
CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN RESEARCH SUBJECT

"Ethnicity, Class, Race, and Gender: Exploring Intersectionality from the Narrative Accounts of Thai Immigrant Women and Their U.S. Husbands"

You are being asked to participate because you are either 1) a Thai immigrant wife a U.S. man who has lived in the US for more than three years at the time of interview and between 20 to 50 years old, or 2) the American husband of a Thai immigrant wife who meets the requirements stated earlier. Participation in this research study is completely voluntary. Please read this information below and ask questions about anything that you do not understand before deciding if you want to participate. A researcher listed below will be available to answer your questions.

INVESTIGATOR AND ADVISOR
Lead Researcher: Panu Suppatkul, graduate student, Department of Sociology
Daytime Phone: 951-961-0851 **Email:** psupp001@ucr.edu
Faculty Advisor: Professor Karen Pyke, Ph.D. - Department of Sociology,
karen.pyke@ucr.edu

If the participants would like to acquire the summary of research results, they can contact the principal investigator using the contacts given above.

PURPOSE OF STUDY
The purpose of this research study is to examine lived experiences of Thai immigrant wives of U.S. men. For wife participants, the study focuses on social experiences in the U.S., immigrant identities, pre-migrant experiences, and assumptions about race, gender, and social class which immigrant wives in this study have been experienced. For husband participants, the study examines experiences of immigrant wives from the perspectives of their husbands, as well as their ideas about race and gender in cross-border relationships.

SUBJECTS
Inclusion Requirements:
You are being asked to participate because you are 1) a Thai immigrant woman married to a U.S. husbands for at least 3 years and between 20 to 45 years old (born in 1970 to 1996). Or you are 2) the American husband of a Thai immigrant wife who meets the above study requirements.

Number of participants:
The investigator plans to enroll 45 Thai immigrant wives and 10 U.S. husbands as participants in this study.

PROCEDURES

- **Individual Interviews** – The wife participants will be asked about their general backgrounds about their life before they immigrated to the U.S., their husbands' backgrounds, and their relationships with relatives in Thailand. The interview questions will ask about the ideas that Thai women have about life in the U.S. before and after immigrating, including ideas about their social experiences, marital dynamics, and relationships with other co-ethnic Thais. Husbands will be asked about their marital dynamics with their wives and their adjustments in the U.S. All the interviews will be conducted by the lead researcher himself (a native Thai graduate student).
- **Audio recording** - The interviews will be audio recorded for transcription. After transcription, the recording will be deleted. The use of audio recorder is not mandatory and <u>the participants can choose to take part in the study without being audio recorded</u>.

The participant understands the purpose of this study
[   ] Yes [   ] No
The participant accepts to be audio recorded
[   ] Yes [   ] No

Total Time Involved:
You will be interviewed for approximately 45 minutes to 2 hours, in one sitting.

RISKS
Known risks: This study involves no more than minimal risk. You might feel discomforts by the interview questions about your private life but there are no known harms associated with this study beyond those encountered in daily life.

BENEFITS
To Participants
There are no direct material benefits to participants. The participants will have the satisfaction of knowing that you are able to express their own voice to academic world, which can be shared to a wider society through the research result.
To Others or Society
Other people may receive the following benefits from the information gathered from this study:
     This study hopes to break a negative stereotype about non-Western women marrying Western men that would give a better understanding to the study of immigration and cross-border marriages in general.

ALTERNATIVES TO PARTICIPATION
The alternative is to not participate in this study.

COMPENSATION/COST/REIMBURSEMENT
There is no compensation for participation.

WITHDRAWAL OR TERMINATION FROM STUDY: You have the right to refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study before it is completed at any time without penalty. The data collected from participants who declared to withdraw from the study during or after the interview will be destroyed immediately once received the verbal or written notification from the participants.

CONFIDENTIALITY
Data Storage: The transcribed interview will be stored in on a password protected computer located in a secured building.

Data Access: Only the primary researcher will have access to the data.

Level of Privacy: All data will be kept confidential and the identity of the respondent will be known only to the researcher. Only your names, e-mail address and/or telephone numbers will be kept separating from the interview data for contact purposes only. There will be minimal links to identify your identities from the data shown in the research result as <u>pseudonyms will be assigned to all respondents, as well as specific places and organizations mentioned in the interviews.</u>

Data Privacy: The audio recordings of interview responses will be transcribed into a Word format and maintained by the principal investigator. After transcription, the audio recording will be destroyed. All data, including the interview responses, transcriptions, e-mail responses will be deleted once all planned papers or manuscripts have been published or 3 years after the research is completed.

IF I HAVE QUESTIONS
If you have questions about your rights or complaints as a research subject, please contact the IRB Chairperson at (951) 827 - 4802 during business hours, or to contact them by email at irb@ucr.edu.

Study Sponsor(s): This is a PhD. Dissertation. The researcher receives no financial support for the research of this study.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS
Conflict of Interest
Investigators must satisfy campus requirements for identifying and managing potential conflicts of interest before a research study can be approved. The purpose of these requirements is to ensure that the design, conduct and reporting of the research will not be affected by any conflicting interests. If at any time you have specific questions about

the financial arrangements or other potential conflicts for this study, please feel free to contact any of the individuals listed above.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION STATEMENT

The researcher is inviting you to be a part of this study voluntarily. . You may refuse to answer any question or discontinue your involvement at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you might otherwise be entitled. Your decision will not affect your future relationship with UC Riverside. Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this consent form and have had a chance to ask any questions you have about the study. You consent to participate.

_____   _____

Signature of Participant   Date

_____   _____

Signature of Investigator   Date

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Ethnicity, Class, Race, and Gender: Exploring Intersectionality in the Narratives of Thai

Immigrant Wives of White U.S. Husbands

Topic: The Construction of Racial and Gendered Stereotypes

<u>Personal Backgrounds</u>
Please pick a name for the researcher to address you in this study: _____
(Pseudonym)
1. How was your life before you come to America?
    Probe: Ask about age, family economic condition, number of siblings, year of immigration, legal status in the U.S., highest education, occupation prior to migration, current occupation, previous marriage(s), year of current marriage, <u>husband's age</u>, <u>husband's occupation</u>, husband's previous marriage(s), and numbers of people in the household.
    What kinds of jobs you want to do when growing up?
    When did you start working?
    Did you help your family financially or they help you?

<u>Dating History and Preferences for a Spouse</u>
Now, I would like to catch up on your personal relationships

2. Looking back when you were younger and thought about marriage, what kind of man did you picture yourself with? What your ideal spouse would be?

3. When you were growing up, did you have any impressions of other racial groups?
    Probe: Where did you get these ideas about men of other racial groups (e.g., hearing stories from others, movies, media or personal experiences, and etc.?)

4. Tell me about your dating history. When did you begin dating? Tell me about the men you dated?
    Probe on race: Have you ever dated Thai men? If so, ask; tell me about your relationships with Thai men?
    What attracted you to them?
    What didn't you like?

5. Tell me about the last relationship (or marriage) you had before you met your husband?
    Probe: How did it end? Why did your earlier relationship(s) or marriage(s) end?
6. Did you ever think about men who were not Thai?

Probe: Did you know since you were young that you were going to marry a foreigner?

      If you did, where did you get the idea?

      If you had never thought about marrying a foreigner before, then what attracted you to your boyfriend/husband?

      Do you think Caucasians are more physically attractive than other racial groups?

7. Looking back in Thailand, did you see or know any Thai women who dated or married foreign men? What were they like?

      Probe: What kinds of things did you hear other people say when Thai women date foreign men and vice versa?

Topic: Marrying a U.S. man

Relationships with White Husbands

8. How did you meet your husband? Tell me about how you got to know him?

      Probe: Describe your boyfriend/husband

      What was your first impression/What attracted you to him?

      Why did you choose your boyfriend/husband?

9. Tell me about your husband. What is he like?

      Probe: Is your husband different from the other men you dated?

      If so, what kinds of differences have you observed among different groups of men you have known or dated?

      Is your husband different from other white U.S. men you knew?

      Tell me some of the things you like most about your husband. (Specific things he did)

10. What is your relationship with your husband?

      Probe: Do you ever compare your relationship with your husband to that of other Thai women who have Thai husband?

      Do you ever compare your relationship with your husband to that of other Thai women who have white husband?

11. Today, if you could change anything about your husband, what would it be?

12. When you were growing up or a young woman, did your family ever talk about the kind of boyfriend/husband they wanted you to have?

      Probe: Did your mother, for example, ever talk to you about selecting a boyfriend/husband?

      Did your family say you should or should not marry a person with certain racial/ethnic/cultural/religious/class backgrounds? If so, what kinds of things did your mother (or family) tell you?

13. Tell me about how your family reacted when you told them you were dating a white American man?
    Probe: What did your family think about you having a relationship with a white American man?
    How do they feel about it today?

14. What do you think about white U.S. men, comparing with other

15. Tell me about your decision to immigrate to the U.S.?

16. What ideas did you have about how life would be in the U.S.?
    Probe: How you were familiar with U.S. culture and what did you know about this country before immigrated?

Topic: Life in the U.S. and Encountered Racial and Gender Stereotypes

17. What was it like adjusting to life in the U.S.?
    Probe: What do you remember when you first came to the U.S.?
    Did anyone help you to adjust to life in the U.S? If so, who?
    How did they help?
    What do you think is different or similar from what you have expected?
    What kinds of things have been easy for you socially?
    What were the most difficult things that you faced in the U.S.? Any examples?
    What did you do to overcome that?

18. What was it like meeting your boyfriend/husband's family for the first time?

19. What is your relationship like with your in-laws today?
    Probe: **Who do you live with today? (Any in-laws?)**
    How often do you meet the in-laws each year?
    What kinds of things do you do when you are with your in-laws?

20. Are there any areas in which your in-laws try to help you?

21. What sorts of things do you do to please your in-laws?

22. Describe your typical daily schedule. What do you do?

23. What kind of social relations you have with other people in the U.S. (e.g., co-workers, acquaintances, and boyfriend/husband's friends)?
    Probe: How have people in general treated you in the U.S.?
    Do you ever feel like you deal with racism? Please describe (Get specific times and events)

Have you ever found that people treat you differently when they learn your husband is white? If so, can you describe such a time?
Have people responded to you and your husband as a mixed-race couple?
Can you describe a time when your being in an interracial marriage was commented on by someone you met?

24. Do people you know ever make assumptions about you as a Thai woman married to a white man? If so, can you describe such a time?
Probe: What kind of assumptions that people here say to you when they know you are a Thai immigrant wife?
Do you think their assumption is fair?
How do you react? (Probe whether they deflect or affirm those assumptions?)

Children and Motherhood
[If respondent has a child]

25. As your children grow up, how have people around them (e.g., teacher, parents of other children, and your child's friends) reacted to you? (Get specific times and events)

26. Have you ever participated in any school involvements (e.g., attended school board meetings, volunteered at school work, engaged in school fundraising and etc.)?
Probe: If so, what was that like for you?
If not, what were the reasons for not participating? What makes it difficult for you to participate in activities at your child's school?

Topic: Class-Based and Ethnic Variations among Thai Immigrant Wives
27. Do you know any other Thai wives of U.S. men? If so, describe some of them?
Probe: What do you have in common with them?

28. How often do you socialize with other Thai wives?
Probe: What kinds of things do you do with them?

29. How do you feel when you are around other Thai wives? (Describe specific times and events)

30. What kind of Thai immigrant women do you prefer to socialize with? Are there any Thai immigrant women you prefer to avoid?

31. Could you tell me about your family members that you talk with regularly?
Probe: Are there any close Thai family members near you?
Do you depend on them for help?
Do you give them money?
What do you think about that?

Topic: Racialized Masculinities (continued)

32. If you were single again, tell me about the kind of man you might be interested in?
    Probe: What kinds of traits in a man would you look for?

33. If you have woman friends or relatives from Thailand who want to marry an American man and come here, what would you tell them?