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SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF CHINESE AMERICAN ETHNIC IDENTITY: DATING ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORS AMONG SECOND-GENERATION CHINESE AMERICAN YOUTHS

by

BAOZHEN LUO

Under the Direction of Sociology Professor Heying Jenny Zhan

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores and identifies patterns of dating attitudes and behaviors among second-generation Chinese Americans. Grounded theory is applied to analyze data from in-depth interviews with 20 second-generation Chinese Americans in metro-Atlanta area. By using a social constructionist model of ethnicity, I uncovered a subtle process by which the second-generation Chinese youths constructed their dating values and identities through both differentiating and integrating their parents' and white peers' dating cultures and gender norms. Second-generation Chinese American youths constructed and reconstructed their own dating values, gender norms, and further ethnic identities through various processes of picking and choosing from both cultures. I argue that straight-line assimilation theories, which assume adaptation into mainstream American culture, do not explain the complexity of the dating culture created by the second-generation Chinese American youths. In conclusion, the findings of this study revealed a new dimension of the social construction of ethnic identity: the agentic dynamics of constructing the second-generation Chinese American identity.

INDEX WORDS: Dating, Confucianism, Patriarchy, Culture, Immigration, Ethnic Identity, Gender, Social Construction, Agency

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by

BAOZHEN LUO

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master's of Arts

In the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2006

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by

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# CHAPTER ONE

# INTRODUCTION

## INTRODUCTION

In the 1960s, immigration law and the civil rights movement marked the beginning of a new phase of immigration to the United States, which is referred to as the "new immigration" (Chin 2000). The 1965 Immigration Act did away with national quotas and gave preferential treatment to relatives of citizens and permanent residents and to those in needed occupations. Under the liberalized law, over 20,000 Chinese have entered the United States each year since 1965 (Coontz, Parson, and Raley 1999). More than thirty years have passed since the influx of immigrants from China began. The children of those immigrants who began arriving in the late 1960s and afterwards, have now come of age. What does "being a Chinese American" mean to these young adults? Which group do they belong to, Chinese or American?

Being born in China or a Chinese person, who grew up in Mainland China and came over to this country at 20 years old, whenever I met my second-generation Chinese American friends from my age cohort, I would automatically make assumptions of my authenticity and their impurity of Chinese-ness. Sometimes, my assumptions seemed to be confirmed, especially in the situations when they tried to split every dime of a meal with me. Other times, my confidence of being an "authentic Chinese" was constantly challenged. For instance, I was always amazed by how much filial piety and obedience that my friends, especially females, showed to their parents and grandparents. However, most of the times, I had mixed impressions. Some of my America-born friends would criticize their parents' rigidity and old-fashioned values on the one hand, and show their

great respect and obedience to their parents on the other hand. I cannot help wondering about their culture and the meanings of Chinese and American cultures to them. What do Chinese and American cultures mean to them? How do they negotiate between these two cultures?

Culture is defined as a shared, learned, and symbolic system of values, beliefs, and attitudes that shapes people's perception and behavior and helps them to cope with their world and with each other (Bates and Plog 2003). It is transmitted from generation to generation through learning (Bates and Plog 2003). It is responsible for forming and shaping society member's attitudes and behaviors (Kibria 1993a). Generally speaking, American culture is considered to emphasize individual liberties and rights. Adolescent's freedom and rights are commonly acknowledged and respected by their parents and various social institutions (Kibira 1993b). In contrast, Chinese culture has been viewed to be highly suppressive of individual liberties and rights (Tang and Zuo 2000).

Because culture is transmitted between generations, family plays a crucial role in passing the culture from one generation to the next. Learning about culture begins in the family (Kibira, 1997). Children learn and develop mores, values, and behavior patterns through socialization. Compared to schools, peers, and other social institutions, families are the main socializing agents which influence the development of children's attitudinal and behavioral orientations (Steinberg, Dornbusch, and Brown 1992). Second-generation Chinese Americans experience a Chinese upbringing, which socializes them into the Chinese values of obedience, honor of family, and respect for parents. According to Dasgupta (1998), Asian Americans, especially first-generation immigrants, make every effort to keep and reinvent Asian cultures and traditions in the U.S. Chinese parents,

especially immigrant parents, and the Chinese community are likely to emphasize and preserve Chinese culture and values in their family education (Kibria 1997). Furthermore, first-generation immigrants rigidly construct and enforce an image of Chinese culture or values, which are in fact specific to the context they were familiar with before they left China. This is referred to as a "museumization" of practices (Das Gupta 1997). In the meantime, second-generation Chinese Americans also attend mainstream schools, communicate with their teachers and non-Chinese peers (particularly the white), and are exposed to American media programs everyday. The sense of Chinese cultural background is likely to be constructed explicitly in opposition to American dominant culture (Kibria 1997).

Second-generation Chinese American children may identify their Chinese upbringing as an important reason for their being different and may not fit in with their peers, particularly their white peers (Kibria 1997). The children of immigrants are inevitably "cultural conflict-bound" (Tong 2003). In other words, these second-generation Chinese American twenty-somethings are in a marginal and "in-between" position (Kibria 1997).

**STATEMENT OF PROBLEMS**

Dating is defined as making regular social appointments with the same person. It refers to couples regularly setting a specific date, time, and place to meet (Zinn and Eitzen 1999). Dating is also defined as the process of meeting people socially for possible mate selection (Benokraitis 1999). As a social behavior, dating fulfills a number of specific functions that enhance one's socio-psychological development and, ultimately, promote a society's continuity. Contemporary literature suggests that dating can be viewed as a way to gain enjoyment, socialization, and social status; it also fulfills ego

needs, or provides opportunities for sexual experimentation and intimacy (Sterling 1992). Essentially, whether people admit it or not, dating is usually a step in mate selection. These functions of dating may change over time. As people mature, their expectations for dating change. For example, mate selection may be more and more emphasized after adolescence (Sterling 1992).

Different cultural orientations may play a role in shaping the differences in dating attitude and behaviors. In this research, I focus on American mainstream dating culture. In contemporary American society, to some extent, dating is viewed as a way to seek enjoyment, and it does not necessary lead to mate selection (Turner 2003). Courting, once a way to select a mate, gave way to dating, which was done for enjoyment (Whyte 1992b). Although dating is still based on the premise that it provides valuable experience that will help individuals select mates, dating today is far removed from mate selection and more focuses on enjoyment or pleasure (Whyte 1992b). The contemporary American dominant dating culture gives popular approval to the youth's informal pairing off with various romantic partners without defining those partners necessarily as potential mates (Whyte 1990).

In contrast, in Chinese culture, dating is instrumental in nature, a way by which a suitable marital partner can be found, and a prelude to marriage (Tang and Zuo 2000). Adolescents' interest in the opposite sex is traditionally perceived as "premature love," to be controlled until they have reached the socially appropriate age for courtship and marriage (Hoing and Hershatter 1988). In the 1980s, *Dating, Marriage, and Families* was one of the few national magazines, which provided information and advice to the youth in socialist China. During that historical period, the communist party exerted

central control over the media. Such magazines represented the mainstream moral and social norms. They played a central role in teaching the youth codes of conduct regarding courtship and marriage. Throughout these magazines, attitudes and behaviors that viewed dating as a way to seek fun or entertainment were consistently deemed immoral in Chinese culture (Luo 1982).

There seem to be some significant contrasts between Chinese and American dating cultures. On the one hand, second-generation Chinese American youths are living and being impacted by their non-Chinese peers, schools, and mass media, which demonstrate another system of dating culture to them. On the other hand, Chinese-American youth are raised and socialized in Chinese families and community. For the second-generation, their parents immigrated to the U.S in the late 1960s and 1970s. The contemporary Chinese dating culture has become more and more open and liberal since the 1990s (Zuo and Tang 2003). However, the parents' views of Chinese dating are still "fixed" in the conservative context of more than 20 years ago. Thus, the purpose of my research is to explore and identify the patterns of dating attitudes and behaviors among second-generation Chinese Americans. Do they acculturate to American dating culture? Or do they negotiate between Chinese and American dating cultures in a way that is neither Chinese nor American, but a creative "balancing culture" between the two dating cultures? The following issues regarding attitudinal and behavioral patterns are addressed in this study: intergenerational negotiation of dating values, the relations of mate selection and dating, recreational terms of dating, gender differences, and premarital sex, specifically sexual intercourse.

# CHAPTER TWO

# LITERATURE REVIEW

## AMERICAN DATING CULTURE

Historically, dating rise in American society in the 1920s due to the invention of automobile and the increase of youth mobility and privacy (Bailey 1989). Couples in the early 1900s got to know each other on the front porch of their parents' home. By the 1920s, the youth increasingly moved their courtship from the private to the public sphere such as theaters, restaurants, dance halls, cars, and so on (Coontz 1993). From the 1920s to about the 1960s, dating was traditionally considered as the dominant mode of courtship or mate selection. It was a fairly formal way of meeting a potential marital partner (Bailey 1989). Dating, especially formal dating, was structured and ruled by codes of dress and behavior. In traditional dating, although men and women went out on dates without parents' involvement, they still followed clearly defined tradition of gender expectations (Coontz 1993). Men were the aggressors. They asked for dates, spent the money on dates, dominated conversations, and they initiated touching and sex. On the other hand, women waited to be pursued rather than to initiate.

Since the 1970s, the forms and nature of dating have changed tremendously. There are a number of new forms of dating as well as some combinations of traditional and contemporary dating. Among more recent cohorts, dating is going beyond traditional practice, replaced by informal pairing off in large groups without the prearrangement of "asking someone out." The new forms include group dating, such as hanging out, or pack dating (Gabardi 1992). Group dating provides entertainment or recreation without feeling pressured to make a commitment to marry. Currently, mate selection is only one

of the many forms that heterosexual dating relationships take. In addition, young women and men start dating and experience greater intimacy at earlier ages than older generations (Turner 2003). Also, there are several dating patterns combining both traditional customs and contemporary forms, such as homecoming parties and dinner dates (Fisher 1992).

Although some traditional gender scripts still remain, contemporary women tend to perform more actively and have more power in heterosexual dating relationships than before. After the 1970s, with the rise of the women's movement, men and women are more likely to split the costs of a date (Rose and Frieze 1993). Sharing dating expenses empowers women in dating relationships. It is much more acceptable for women to initiate or ask for dates from men today than in the period of traditional dating.

There is an abundance of research on contemporary dating in American society. According to a survey conducted in 1990, approximately 90% of males and 88% of females had their first dating experience by the age of 16 (Thornton 1990). Whyte (1990) stated that dating might be seen primarily in the aspect of recreational orientation for adolescents who had just started dating. Dating, especially group dating or hanging out, became a way to test one's attraction to the opposite sex and have fun. Thornton (1990) found that individuals were not motivated to date those who might be most suited to them, but those who were most likely to be defined as a "good date" or a "good catch" by peers.

The marketplace-learned concept of dating might be considered the "orthodox" rationale for American dating culture. This concept suggests that a considerable amount of knowledge and experience guarantee a good mate (Whyte 1990). It assumes that

length of dating experience, variety in dating partners, and the extent of premarital intimacy are all useful preparations for a successful marriage. According to this argument, individuals who have gained more dating experience, will have more opportunity to consider a wider range of potential marital candidates and are able to make better choices about their marriages. What's more, not only dating with a variety of dating partners, but also development of a high level of premarital intimacy with at least some of them, is seen as a useful learning process by American dating culture.

In terms of premarital intimacy, there has been growing approval of premarital sex in American dating culture (Turner 2003). In the early 20th century, virginity was seen as a prerequisite for a "good marriage" for women (Bailey 1989). Young women invariably became categorized or stigmatized into two groups: the "nice girls" who didn't engage in premarital sex, and the "easy girls" who did. For men, there was a double standard. Young males "anxious to sow their wild oats provided lots of attention" (Turner 2003) for the "easy girls", but when it came time to select a girl for marriage they usually turned, instead, to one of the "nice girls."

In contemporary American society, men are still allowed to be sexually active with the women they date, but people's attitude to women's virginity and premarital sex has changed markedly. Young women are generally not expected to be virgins at marriage anymore (Rose and Frieze 1993). Engaging in sex or even cohabitating with their dates prior to marriage is no longer considered harmful to a woman's chances of making a suitable marriage. The division of "nice girls" and "easy girls" still exists. But the categories have been redefined. "Nice girls" include those who are intimate, sexually and otherwise, but only in the context of an exclusive, romantic relationship. Promiscuity

now has a narrower meaning of casual sex or sex that is not exclusively with one partner, rather than premarital sex per se (Whyte 1990).

## CHINESE DATING CULTURE

Prior to the Communist Revolution in 1949, arranged marriage (*fumu baoban*) by the parents was the dominant form of courtship. There was no paradigm of dating in traditional Chinese Society. Marriage was primarily a fulfillment of family obligation, a continuation of family line, and observance of filial piety (Honig and Hershatter 1998).

In 1950, a new democratic marriage law was enacted. "Marriage Contract" section clearly elaborated, "Marriage is based upon the complete willingness of the two parties. Neither party shall use compulsion and no third party is allowed to interfere" (Johnson 1983, p.235). With the passage of this law, dating emerged in Chinese society. However, most of the parents were still able to exert their power and authority with the consent of the young people (Yan 2003).

A number of researchers suggested that since the 1980s there had been an increasing popularity of dating in China after the nationwide Economic Reform and the "Open Door" policy, which were implemented by the communist state in order to modernize the nation. (Whyte 1992a; Xu 1990; Yan 2003). The youth were increasingly gaining more economic power than ever before. In addition, more and more Western culture regarding dating, love, and romance had flowed into Chinese society (Yan 2003). Due to the short history of Chinese dating culture and the influence of arranged marriage traditions, there was little literature on the dating behaviors and attitudes compared to those in America.

In contemporary Chinese society, dating is instrumental in nature, a way by which a suitable marital partner is found, and a prelude to marriage (Honig and Hershatter 1998;

Tang and Zuo 2000). Those who fail to conform to this social norm are often punished by their parents or other familial authorities. Deviation from this cultural orientation is generally frowned upon in the Chinese society (Luo 1982). Dating in high school is considered a deviant behavior. Both the school authorities and parents disapprove of any dating attempts at high school level (Xiong 1988). The average age in high school for Chinese students is around 15-18. Therefore, the pursuit of personal meaning and the search for sexual identity can only be attempted after graduation from high school. Therefore, most first dates do not occur until after the age of 18.

According to the propaganda of the central government via the media, the number of dating relationships that an adult has experienced prior to marriage has a negative effect on that person's reputation or people's judgment regarding his/her morality (Luo 1982). Various romantic dating relationships are condemned by social norms. Dating only one person, marrying that person, and devoting loyalty to each other are strongly extolled as a high moral standard in Chinese society.

In terms of the gender issues, men have all the power in the dating process. Men in Chinese society are encouraged to find the perfect woman by all available means, including gift-giving, courting, writing love letters, and dating arrangements (Chen, Davies, and Elliot 2004). Conversely, in Chinese culture, women's active pursuit of men has not been socially acceptable and most often seen as negative and damaging to the image of those women involved (Honig and Hershatter 1998). A Chinese woman is expected to be passive and submissive in dating; she waits for the man to court her, or bears the risk of losing face if her pursuit of a man is discovered by her family or friends. Generally, women have no power to "go after" and court men.

As far as sexuality is concerned, prior to the economic reform, premarital sex and cohabitation were frowned upon (Turner 2003). Although after the Economic Reform, the rate of sexual activity involving intercourse before marriage has increased, China still preserves an old tradition of reticence on the topic of sexuality (Turner 2003). In the 1980s, premarital sex is still viewed as "poison that is harmful to the moral health of the whole society" (Luo 1982). "Sex has been something that could not be explicitly explained" (Croll 1995). Even marital sex is a taboo subject as an aspect of private life. Both men and women are taught to be abstinent in a dating relationship and are encouraged to put more effort into pursuing a career and serving the development of the socialist country (Qin 1988).

As a consequence of the "Open-Door" Policy, public discussions of sexuality and sexual health increase gradually after 1985, but they are limited to married couples (Qin 1988). Under the supervision of parental authority, premarital sex is still considered a deviant behavior in China, especially for women. In Tang and Zuo's (2000) quantitative research conducted in the most modern city—Shanghai in the 1990s—only 20% of the total Chinese college students in their sample (who are not allowed to get married according to Chinese law) have experienced sexual intercourse.

## CHINESE CONFUCIANISM AND PATRIARCHY

It is commonly believed that Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism are the three major compositions of Chinese tradition (Fairbank 1983, de Bary 1999). Buddhism and Taoism may have mostly contributed to the Chinese religiosity and spirituality (Garnet 1975). Confucianism, on the other hand, has deeply influenced Chinese society from ancient to contemporary China with regard to politics, economics, culture, and education

(Pye 1984). Moreover, it has provided the most important moral codes guiding individual conduct and social interaction. The doctrines of Confucianism define a person's position, responsibility, obligations, and morality within a hierarchal structure of a society and family (Fei 1992).

According to Confucian codes of conduct, the traditional family system was characterized by arranged marriage, patrilineage, and age hierarchy in favor of the old (Fei 1992). In other words, men dominated women; the old dominated the young. These characteristics of Chinese family defined an individual's status, role, privilege, duties, and liabilities within the family system (Stacey 1983). They regulated individuals' lives in various aspects, including mate selection and individual autonomy. For the purpose of this study, I will elaborate on three aspects of Confucian influences—women's subordinate position, filial piety, and emphasis on education.

***Women's Position***

Since the ancient time of the Western Zhou dynasty (1100 B.C. - 770 BC), females have been assigned as *yin*, which stands for the north side of mountain, dark, earth, cold, negative, and death. Males, on the other hand, are considered *yang*, which represents the south side of the mountain, light, heaven, warmth, positive, and life (Johnson 1983). Confucian tradition further legitimized a rigid hierarchy of men's dominance over women, which has fundamentally dominated Chinese society and families for over 2000 years. Women's subjugation to men became legalized in the Han dynasty (206 B.C.E.-220 A.D) and was further re-enforced by later dynasties. Confucian ethics defined woman's position as inferior to man's. Women were subordinated to the

principles of “Three Bonds of Obedience:” to obey fathers when young, husbands when married, and adult sons when widowed (Johnson 1983).

Women’s subordination was largely shaped by patrilocal marriage and patrilineal inheritance system, which encouraged the traditional preferences for sons. Sons were considered more valuable than daughters because in the event of marriage, the former carried on the family name and took on the responsibility of taking care of aging parents, while the latter departed to live with their new husbands and took care of parents-in-law. In contemporary China, it is no surprise that certain levels of discrimination against daughters still exist in rural China. Ties between parents and their adult sons continue to be stronger than ties between parents and adult daughters.

As far as women’s family responsibilities were concerned, in traditional Chinese family, women were expected to manage and perform all domestic housework; they should never participated in any public affairs (Wolf and Witke 1975). When it came to caring for aging parents, women were the ones who performed most of the care work. A daughter-in-law’s service to her parents-in-law was also enforced by law in all dynasties (Zhan 1996). As far as childcare was concerned, similarly, women bore most of the burden. Women directly supervised and guided their adolescent children’s educational and emotional development, thus, exerted great influence in children’s lives (Yan 2003).

In Communist China today, even though most women participate in labor force, Chinese women continues to practice “traditional” familial care while performing the double-day duties of working inside and outside the home (Zhan & Montgomery 2003). Although women gained more access to the public sphere through their participation in the public labor force, contemporary Chinese society continues to be patriarchal,

patrilineal, and patrilocal. Nevertheless, women are increasingly gaining equal access to education in urban China (Honig and Hershatter 1998; Tsui and Rich 2002), while in rural areas, there has been some level of acceptance for female leadership. In the realm of family life, women have also gained more influence and respect along with their financial contribution to the family. However, a division of labor by gender in public and private spheres remains central to contemporary Chinese society (Stacey 1983). Some scholars (Stacey 1983; Johnson 1983; Honig and Hershatter 1998; Yan 2003) argue that the Chinese Communist Party does not liberate women but rather, creates new forms of "public" patriarchy. For instance, the housing distribution in China is male-centered. Women are facing huge pressure to focus on marriage and family rather than career. The one-child policy allows couples to have a second child if the first one is female. These state policies maintain men's dominance over women and further exert control over women's lives.

***Filial Piety***

Based on Confucian code of conduct, the ideal family structure is "a family based on principles of gender and generational hierarchy expressed formally in a doctrine of filial piety supported by the full weight of social custom and legal authority" (Johnson 1983 p.248). Filial piety begins with service and obedience to parents, continues with total devotion to their welfare, and extends with loyalty to rulers and authorities in the society. It was considered as the basis of family and social order. In one of Confucian classics, *Classics of Filial Piety*, Confucius taught his students that "Filiality is the root of virtue and the wellspring of instruction" (Bary and Bloom 1999 p.325). In pre-modern

China, children's filial piety to their parents was enforced by law. Infractions of filial piety were punished by the extended family and the dynastic laws (Zhan 1996).

Since the founding of communist China in 1949, the socialist transformation of the whole society has weakened the status of the elders in the family (Chen 1996). However, these social changes have had only limited effect on the status of elders within their families. Family support is the still the major source of elder care in China. Adult children and elder parents still maintain strong emotional and economic connections (Bengtson, Kim, Myers, and Eun 2000). In 1996, China Communist Party passed *Law of Elders' Right Protection* (Laonianren Quanyi Baozhang Fa) (Chinalawedu.com 2006), which officially enforced adult children's obligation to respect and take care of their aging parents physically, financially, and emotionally. The law formally regulated adult children's provision for aging parents in terms of housing, medical care, property protection and so on.

***Education***

As far as education was concerned, Confucius and his followers believed that there were strong relations between education and an individual's upward social mobility. According to Pye (1984), "The Chinese early developed a profound faith in education and held that human nature could be perfected" (p.31). All individuals ought to perfect themselves mainly through education and hard work. The cultural ideal for individual perfection through education has been carried on by consecutive generations. In contemporary Chinese society, the belief that educational achievement is the only means for upward social mobility has been strengthened with the implementation of annual entrance exam to college since 1979. This standard exam, which is held once a year, is

viewed as the most crucial step in an individual's life for upward social mobility. Achieving a high score on this test is the only goal for Chinese adolescents in high school (Tang and Zuo 2000).

The emphasis on education is one of the most important reasons that dating in high school is banned by parents and schools in contemporary Chinese society. For youths in college, dating is not explicitly banned but never encouraged (Tang and Zuo 2000). Marriage is absolutely frowned upon because college is considered the phase for educational achievement rather than development of personal relationship. In 1990, the Educational Bureau implemented College Students Administration Regulation (CSAR), which stated that any college students who got married during the college years would be forced to drop out of the school. In recent years, college students' autonomy over dating and marriage has been slowly loosened. In 2005, a revised CSAR stated that schools and parents had no right to intervene college students' right to get married. However, the practice of such regulation is still controversial in contemporary Chinese society.

**ASIAN AMERICAN FAMILIES**

Contemporary Chinese American and other Asian ethnic groups are often stereotyped as "model minorities" (Lee 1994), who are described as hardworking, well-educated, and successful. Specifically, second-generation Chinese Americans affirm this popular stereotype. The stereotype of model minority connects the success of Asian Americans to the strength of the Asian family values, which works to enhance Asian American self/ethnic identity and group cohesion in the United States.

Early research shows that Asian American families have the features of the strong nuclear family unit and strong commitment to the extended family (Fong 1998). Espiritu (1996) states that prior to the 1960s, despite continual renegotiation due to the harsh immigration law and other structural suppression, Asian American families are still based on the principle of the dominance of men over women and elders over the young.

Since 1965, Asian American families and Asian American women have experienced huge changes. After the passage of the Immigration Reform Act, the majority of Asian immigrants arrive as families intending permanent settlement rather than as sojourning single men. Whereas the old immigration was composed mostly of men, the contemporary flow is female dominant (Fong 1998). With the increase of the women's labor force participation, full-time employment, and acceptance of higher education, contemporary Asian American communities became more gender balanced than before. Espiritu (1996) argues that Asian women's ability to challenge traditional patriarchy rests on the dependence of Asian men on the economic and social resources of women. As a consequence, both greater gender equality and the persistence of male privilege exist in the Asian American community.

Along with changing gender roles, Asian American families also confront major shifts in authority between old and young (Espiritu 1996). Second-generation Asian Americans, who have grown up in the United States, possess greater language skills, educational achievements, and working opportunities than their parents, especially when the parents are working-class.

Like other Asian groups, studies on Chinese American families are limited due to the comparatively small population and the image of not being a "problem" minority.

Existing research shows that the relations in Chinese American families have experienced transformation from the Confucian hierarchy to greater gender and generational equality. Furthermore, Tong (2003) points out that gender roles are more equal in the professional Chinese American families than in working-class families.

**ASIAN AMERICAN ETHNIC IDENTITIES**

Whether they were born in America or in foreign countries, Asian Americans—as racialized ethnics—are often assumed to be foreigners (Espiritu 2001). Psychologists Sue and Kitano develop a personality structure to explain Asian American identity (Sue and Kitano 1973). Drawing from ethnic culture and American white racism, and highly influenced by assimilation theory, they classify the Asian American into four categories: traditionalist, assimilationist, bicultural, and marginal (Sue and Kitano 1973). The levels of their ethnic identities are ordered from the highest to the lowest. The traditionalists refer to the first-generation immigrants who hold the traditional Asian heritage from their motherlands. The assimilationists are the later generations who make every effort to be fully Americanized. They adopt American culture, values, and norms as their own. The bicultural are those who move freely between Asian and American cultures. And the marginal are those who reject both Asian and American cultures (Sue and Kitano 1973). According to this model, the first generations have the highest ethnic identification while the later generations will be much more assimilated into the mainstream society.

However, more recent research on the "new second generation" suggests that Asian American ethnic identity is socially constructed by external factors along with internal factors. It is fluid, situational, multilayered, and multidirectional rather than static as the two models described above. For example, racism forces Chinese Americans to become

aware of their racialized marginality from the identity *American*. Asian families and communities, which try to preserve the Asian traditions and values also play an important role in shaping their ethnic identity. Furthermore, individual cognitive differences influence Asian Americans' construction of their identities as well. The consciousness, adoption, and application of ethnic identity may shift back and forth within an individual's lifetime depending on the environment encountered (Tsai, Ying, and Lee 2000).

Some studies which apply this model indicate that many Chinese American youths, especially the second-generation Chinese Americans are torn between being Chinese and being American. They range from "bananas"[1] or the "whitewashed," who reject everything Chinese and act completely Euro-American to "FOB" (Fresh off the Boat), who adhere to the Chinese ethnic identity (Tong 2003). Tuan (1998) finds that among the second-generation Chinese Americans, the majority seldom identify themselves as American, because they equate "American" with "white." However, they also discover that their claim to being Chinese is tentative. Their American birth and upbringing undercut their authenticity as "real Chinese." Low proficiency in Chinese imposes more doubt on the claim (Tong 2003).

Contemporary research also suggests that like other Asian groups, second-generation Chinese Americans' sense of Chinese cultural background is explicitly constructed in opposition to American dominant culture (Kibria 1997; Kibria 1993a). For example, Indian Asians are primarily concerned with women's chastity in order to maintain an important cultural distinction between "us" and "the Americans" (Lessinger 1995). The

[1] The term "banana" is a derogatory term referring to a Chinese-American who is "yellow" on the outside, referring to skin color, and "white" on the inside, referring to their attitudes and behaviors.

Filipino immigrants use restrictive gender roles and moral values to assert cultural superiority over the dominant group (Espiritu 2001). Some Chinese also try to create boundaries of "Chinese-ness" by distinguishing from that of a "mainstream" White culture. Some of them construct Chinese Confucianism as principled and superior, and consider "American" culture as deviant and morally flawed, especially regarding sexuality and gender. (Pyke and Johnson 2003). It is important to note that in the process of the social construction of "mainstream American culture," diversity and variance within American culture are ignored or deemed unimportant. As Lessinger (1995) and Pyke and Johnson (2003) point out, Asian Americans construct "their" American culture as a whole to distinguish from "our" Asian culture.

**ASIAN AMERICAN DATING AND INTERRACIAL DATING**

There is a paucity of material on Asian American's dating behaviors and attitudes. However, we still can find a few materials related to dating, which are included in studies of Asian American marriage. Kibria (1993b; 1997) conducts research to explore how the second-generation Chinese and Korean Americans negotiate between Chinese or Korean traditional culture and American mainstream culture within the context of dating and marriage. She (1997) finds a pervasive sense of shared Asian American culture, which goes beyond their racial commonality. This shared racial and cultural identity among Chinese and Korean immigrants produces a dating and marital preference to each other that preserves their boundaries of "Asian-ness".

Much existing research concentrates on Asian American (Japanese, Chinese, and Korean) interracial dating. For instance, Fujino (1997) finds that Asian women and men date outside of their ethnic groups at the same rate. However, Asian women most often

date white men, and Asian men most often date women from other Asian groups. Asian Americans are also more likely to date rather than marry outside of their groups (Chin 2000).

In terms of premarital sex, like other Asian groups, Chinese youth seem to be more conservative than their white counterparts (Tong 2003). According to Tong's (2003) study of 114 Chinese male and female college students, more than 90% of them had not engaged in premarital sex. Also, female students tended to be more conservative than males. He (2003) attributes their low level of sexual permissiveness to their needs for emotional commitment, lack of acculturation, and traditional Chinese moral emphasis on sexual restraint. Espiritu (2001) also finds that Asian women often view American "White" girls as sexually promiscuous. They empower themselves and reinforce their ethnic boundaries by using their own sexually "moral" behavior. In addition, it has been documented that gender differences between men and women in terms of sexuality and dating are closing in mainstream culture (Turner 2003). However, few studies have been conducted to examine whether this trend is happening for Asian American youths.

In contrast to the lack of material on Asian American dating, there is a copious amount of literature addressing interracial marriages of Asian Americans. After the passage of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, which opened the doors for Asian immigration, there was a remarkable increase in the rate of Asian-White interracial marriage, which peaked after the 1980s. One of the earliest studies of Asian American out-marriage, which is conducted in Los Angeles, finds that 30.2% percent of the Chinese Americans marry outside of their own group. Sixty-six percent of these out-marriages are Chinese-White marriages (Fong 1998). Another study conducted by Lee and

Yamanaka in 1990 confirms that more Asian women than men outmarries to White. They also find that well-educated and professional Asian Americans are more likely to date and marry whites (Fong 1998). Interracial marriages are consistently considered as a marker for acculturation, which is summarized by Gordon (1964) as marital assimilation or the process of amalgamation. According to Gordon, Asian-White marriage is a positive sign of acceptance by the mainstream society. Other find that the third generation has higher interracial marriage rates than the second generation, which in turn has more interracial marriage than the first immigrant generation (Chin 2000).

# CHAPTER THREE

# CONCEPTUAL MODELS

The theoretical framework of this project consists of assimilation theory, a social constructionist model of ethnicity, and social construction of gender. The theoretical perspectives are used to conceptualize the research questions. This chapter discusses three theoretical perspectives and how they inform the research and help generate the research questions.

## ASSIMILATION THEORY

Assimilation has been defined as the "social, economic, and political integration of an ethnic minority group into mainstream society" (Yetman 1991). Gordon (1964) states that Anglo-conformity is the historical pattern of assimilation of ethnic and racial minorities in the United States. He also breaks the assimilation process into three subprocesses: cultural, structural, and marital assimilation. Acculturation occurs when an ethnic group's cultural patterns change to those of the host society (Gordon 1964). He suggests that the minority group surrender all aspects of their culture and adopt the dominant white values in America. Cultural assimilation includes both behavioral and attitudinal changes.

The assimilation theory has been challenged by more contemporary social scientists because of its Anglo-conformity perspective (Tuan 1998; Tong 2003; Tsai, Ying, and Lee 2000). However, in the studies of minority social status, upward mobility, and family values, assimilation theory is still considered as a valuable theoretical framework in the study of minority and immigrant cultures.

According to assimilation theory, the second-generation Chinese Americans would experience various levels of cultural assimilation, which includes accepting the mainstream American dating and sexual values. In this study, I explore only the attitudinal and behavioral acculturation among second-generation Chinese youth in terms of their dating and sexuality. Structural assimilation is not discussed because it is not directly related to the research questions. As far as marital assimilation is concerned, interracial relationships are addressed in this project.

## A SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONIST MODEL OF ETHNICITY

The social constructionist model of ethnicity stresses that the two basic building blocks of ethnicity, identity and culture are constructed through social interactions inside and outside ethnic community (Nagel 1994). Ethnicity is the product of a dialectical process involving not only the actions conducted by the ethnic group, which shape and reshape their self-definition and culture, but also the forces from the external larger society, which also shape and reshape ethnic definitions and categories. Ethnicity is constantly undergoing reconstruction and reinvention instead of simply a fixed meaning of culture (Nagel 1994). The social constructionist view of ethnicity focuses on the shifting, volitional, and situational nature of ethnicity.

Ethnic boundaries, which determine who is a member and who is not, are constantly constructed through individual identification, ethnic group formation, informal ascription, and official ethnic policies (Nagel 1994; Espiritu 2001; Kibria 1993b; Smith 1991). Particular ethnic identities are created, emphasized, chosen or discarded over time in different social context. Culture, which provides the content and meaning of ethnicity, is also constructed by the actions of individual and groups and their interactions with larger

society. Through the reconstruction of historical culture and the invention of new culture, not only is the ethnic culture reinvented, but ethnic boundaries and the meaning of ethnicity are also revitalized and redefined (Nagel 1994). As individuals move across various interactional contexts, the boundaries of social differences are redefined and a multilayered structure of identities is thus constructed (Negal 1994; Espiritu 1992).

Espiritu (1992) focuses on how Asian Americans define and redefine three types boundaries—national, racial, and ethnic boundaries. She used Korean Americans as an example. A national identity "American" is commonly applied, the racial identity of "Asian American" is imposed through interaction with mainstream American culture, and a "Korean" or "Korean American" ethnic identity is deployed through interaction with other Asian ethnics. Pyke and Dang (2003), on the other hand, focus on the internal boundaries that mark cultural struggles and differences within ethnic groups. Pyke and Dang (2003) explore the sub-ethnic identities, the process by which they are created, and the internal boundaries they reflect. They find that negative identity terms "FOB" (Fresh Off the Boat) and "whitewashed" are mostly used by Asian American youths to socially categorized their peers within the same ethnic groups.

According to this model, second-generation Chinese American's ethnic identity is constantly constructed and reconstructed through the interactions between themselves, their groups, and with the larger society. They invent and create the boundaries between "Chinese-ness" and American dominant culture through a constant negotiation and delineation of the social boundaries. Second-generation Chinese Americans reconstruct Chinese dating culture, which is transmitted by their immigrant parents and Chinese community, who "museumized" Chinese culture. They also reinvent current Chinese

American culture by lumping all aspects of American culture into one mainstream culture with no diversity. Consequently they set the boundaries between the Chinese-ness and American-ness. For example, by using strict gender or sexuality morality, they distinguish "us"—Chinese, who practice Confucianism from "them"—the Americans, who are morally corrupted. In addition, a social constructionist model of ethnicity also suggests multilayered identity construction within second-generation Chinese American youths. Through interaction with immigrant parents, white and Chinese peers, the second-generation Chinese American youths may also create boundaries with their coethnic peers. They differentiate themselves from others based on levels of acculturation to American culture, levels of attachment to Chinese culture, social locations, life experiences, etc.

Based on the social constructionist view of ethnic identity, second-generation Chinese Americans would have their own particular pattern of dating attitudes and practices, which not only integrates but also differentiates from both Chinese and American dating culture. Such a pattern also varies within the group and changes over time depending on the situations they encounter and how they interact with those situations. Their age, gender, generational differences from their parents, and the different cultural environment they have encountered would be considered as the factors which shape their negotiation of dating attitudes and behaviors. In this study, I would apply social constructionist theory to explore how second-generation Chinese American youths construct their ethnic identities and what factors influence the process of this identity construction.

## DOING GENDER

A social constructionist theory of gender emphasizes the day-to-day production or doing of gender (Coltrane 1989; West and Zimmerman 1987). Fundamentally, gender is about social interaction. According to West and Zimmerman (1987), gender is embedded in every aspect of everyday interactions. One's actions in doing gender simultaneously produce, reproduce, sustain and legitimate the social meanings accorded to gender.

Accountability is one of the key concepts of "doing gender" theory (West and Fenstermaker 1995). Society is structured according to a dichotomous sex categorization—male and female. Doing gender is to make one's actions accountable in terms of their appropriateness to sex category (West and Fenstermaker 1995; West and Zimmerman 1987). For example, women try to live up the social expectation of being gentle and submissive, and man act based on the social expectation of being tough and strong. Thus, doing gender has the effect of producing and reproducing the notion of "essential difference between females and males" (West Zimmerman 1987; Pyke and Johnson 2003). As a result, doing gender maintains the status quo of subordination of women to men. "Doing gender" theory also suggests that gender is not a natural state of being. Rather, the meaning of gender shifts and changes based on the social context an individual is situated (West and Fenstermaker 1995). Gender is situational, fluid, and shifting through individuals' interaction with various social contexts. For example, in order to obtain accountability, individuals try to perform and do gender properly in different cultures with different gender norms (Pyke and Johnson 2003).

Doing gender theory is a useful framework to examine second-generation Chinese American youths' performance of gender across two "oppositional" cultures—Chinese

and mainstream American cultures. How do second-generation Chinese American youths may perceive and respond to Chinese gender norms which are reinforced by their immigrant parents? Do they construct Chinese cultural world as patriarchal and resist to them (Pyke and Johnson 2003)? How do they construct and respond to American gender norms? Do they perceive mainstream American culture as prototype of gender equality? How do they negotiate between these two cultures in terms of gender expectations? Doing gender theory will provide insight to these questions.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Qualitative data collection and analysis were used in this study. Qualitative research begins with statements of directions of inquiry, with the goal of generating theory, rather than testing hypotheses. Based on the above theoretical models and the existing literature, instead of proposing and testing hypotheses, I developed and explored the following questions to investigate Chinese-American dating. Except the overarching question, each research question is tied to one of my research aims. These questions were modified and new questions were raised based on the information gathered during the in-depth interviews.

### *General Question:*

Do second-generation Chinese American youth assimilate to American dating culture or negotiate between Chinese and American dating cultures?

**Aim 1:** To utilize assimilation theory to examine second-generation Chinese Americans' attitudes towards Chinese and American dating culture.

*Question 1:* What messages about dating do young adult Chinese Americans receive from their family and Chinese community? What are their attitudes toward these messages?

*Question 2:* What messages about dating do young adult Chinese Americans receive from American mainstream culture? What are their attitudes toward these messages?

**Aim 2:** Using a social constructionist model of ethnicity and doing gender theory to explore socially constructed meanings of dating for second-generation Chinese Americans youth.

*Question 1*: How do Chinese American Youth negotiate between Chinese and American dating values and related gender norms?

**Aim 3:** To explore the process of gendered and racialized ethnic identity construction among second-generation Chinese Americans youth within the context of their dating attitudes and behaviors.

*Question 1:* How do Chinese American Youth construct their "Chinese-ness" in dating culture? Do they differentiate "our" Chinese norm from "their"—American norm?

*Question 2:* How do they construct "our" Chinese American dating behavior? Do they differentiate "us"—the Chinese from "them"—the Americans regarding dating behaviors?

# CHAPTER FOUR

# METHODOLOGY

## SAMPLE

This research used qualitative methods involving in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 20 second-generation and 1.5 generation[2] Chinese Americans. A convenience sample was collected by the method of snowball sampling through personal and internet announcements at several universities in metro-Atlanta areas. I also recruited some respondents who were not university students while I was attending some Asian community activities. Each interview was conducted in English and tape-recorded and then transcribed. Field notes describing the social environment and participants' body language were taken as well.

As indicated in Table 1, of the 20 interviewees, 11 were second-generation Chinese Americans who were born in this country, and 9 were 1.5-generation Chinese Americans who immigrated to this country before age 12. Of the nine 1.5-generation Chinese Americans, 3 came to this country before 8 years old, and 5 immigrated to the U.S. between 8 and 12 years old. The reason that I also included 1.5-generation Chinese Americans in my sample is as follows: Compared to the first-generation immigrants, the 1.5-generation Chinese American youths had similar situations to the second-generation Chinese American youth regarding their ethnic identities and attachment to both Chinese and American cultures. Kibria (1993a) suggested that the attachment to the home culture undoubtedly had much to do with the age at which they had migrated. Biologically, the age of 12 is considered as the beginning of the adolescence or the start of puberty and the

[2] In this study, 1.5-generation immigrants are defined as people who were not born in the United states, but immigrated to this country before 12 years old.

beginning of the core socialization process. Among immigrants, adolescence (greater than 12 years old) is "the dividing line in terms of cultural affinity" (Piore 1979). So, I think the age 12 is a suitable dividing line to choose 1.5-generation Chinese American interviewees. Most importantly, what I was also interested in is whether there was significant difference between second-generation and 1.5-generation Chinese Americans in the aspects of their dating attitudes and ethnic identity. Additionally, among 1.5-generation Chinese American respondents, I explored whether their ages of immigration affected their attitudes toward family values and American cultures and further shaped their identity differently.

The sample ranged in age from 18 to 28. Originally, the targeted age range of the interviewees was 21 to 30, because at age 21, individuals can legally consume alcoholic beverages and be permitted entry into a variety of social environments including bars, dance clubs, and keg parties. Further more, 21 to 30 is the age range that people attend college or just enter the work force. Additionally, people in this age range are the most active in dating and sexual activities. However, during the process of recruiting interviewees, I found that most of second-generation Chinese Americans started dating much younger than 21 years old. So I decided to expand the qualified age to 18 to 30 years old. Of the 20 respondents, 7 were 20 or younger, 10 were 21 or older, and the rest 3 were 25 or older. The reasons that I chose age 21 and age 25 as the dividing line were because 21 was the legal age to consume alcohol and 25 was considered as the age to start "establishing family and career" by the interviewees' parents.

As shown in Table I, the sample consisted of 10 females and 10 males. None of them was married at the time of interviews. One girl was engaged during the interview, but she

claimed that she would not get married for at least 2 to 3 years. The interviewees' religious backgrounds were also asked during the interviews. Three respondents defined themselves as religious. Two females were Christians, and one male identified himself as Buddhist. The rest claimed that they did not have any religious belief.

Fourteen respondents obtained or were working on their Bachelor's Degrees. The remaining six obtained or were working on their Master's Degrees. Six out of the 20 interviewees reported that their parents immigrated to this country before 1980s, and the rest reported their parents' time of immigration after the 1980s. Of the 20 respondents, thirteen were living with their parents at the time of the interviews. Six were living in the dorms or rented apartments by themselves. One respondent (Bebe) told me that she lived by herself for weekdays and went home to stay with her parents during weekends.

In terms of family income and family socio-economic status (SES), seven respondents' family incomes were $50,000 or over per year. Three respondents reported that their family incomes were lower than $50,000 per year. Eight of them reported that their family income were $100,000 or higher per year. One respondent skipped the question, and another respondent defined her family background as Upper Middle class. Although the family income ranged from $20,000 to more than $200,000, the majority of the respondents came from middle or upper middle class. Only three respondents reported that both of their parents had only high school educations. The rest of the parents received at least a college education. Half of the respondents reported that at least one of their parents had Master's or Ph.D degrees.

Eight of the 20 respondents were raised in small town areas in Florida and Tennessee, where there were small Chinese or Asian populations. Three of the 20

respondents were brought up in the areas (Los Angeles and New York), where around half of the populations are Asians, as they described. And all of the three respondents came to Atlanta after 18 years old. The remaining nine respondents were all raised and spent their adolescence in Georgia. Compared to California and New York, Georgia has a much smaller Asian population. However, as the biggest city in Southeast, Atlanta has a much larger Asian population in comparison to other areas in Southeast. One of the nine interviewees spent a large amount of time in South America for his childhood before he was 10 years old. Three other participants reported that they spent more than 1 year in China or Taiwan.

**LIMITATIONS**

Being a small research project, this study has several evident limitations. First of all, this sample was a convenience sample and the sample size was comparatively small. Second, as the respondents and their parents were mostly college educated and majority of their family SES were between middle-class and Upper middle class, distinct class or SES differences have not been observed during the process of date analysis. However, I strongly believe that the strengths of the sample prevail over the disadvantages especially due to the equal numbers of male and female participants. Moreover, there were significant variations of the age, age of immigration, living arrangement, and locations where they grew up among the participants. A diverse and mixed group of second-generation and 1.5-generation Chinese Americans was represented. Second, my sample is composed of mostly individuals from middle-class or upper middle class socioeconomic background. This is a common problem among Asian American studies because of the convenience sample from colleges. Third, most of the respondents are

from household with two biological parents. Future studies will benefit from recruiting a larger size sample with diverse backgrounds with regard to socioeconomic status and family structures. Fourth, heterosexual dating is my only focus in this research. None of the respondents identified themselves homosexual, although I did not reject or intentionally recruit interviewees with homosexual orientations.

**Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Sample**

| | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| Gender | | |
| Male | 10 | 50% |
| Female | 10 | 50% |
| Education | | |
| Undergraduate | 14 | 70% |
| Graduate | 6 | 30% |
| Living with Parents | | |
| Yes | 6 | 30% |
| No | 13 | 65% |
| Others | 1 | 5% |
| Born In the United States | | |
| Yes | 11 | 55% |
| No | 9 | 45% |
| Religion | | |
| Buddhist | 1 | 5% |
| Christian | 2 | 10% |
| No Religion | 17 | 85% |
| | Mean | |
| Age | 21.8 | |
| Family Income | 96.4 K | |

## QUESTIONNAIRE

A five-page questionnaire including open-ended questions and follow-up probes guided the intensive interview process. According to the research questions I proposed in Chapter 3, there were four sections for the questionnaire in this study. The first two sections—family values of dating and images of American dating—link to Aim 1 of this study. They examined the second-generation Chinese Americans' attitudes toward both Chinese and American dating culture. The following three sections—definition of dating, dating attitudes, and dating behaviors—answered the questions in Aim 2 about how their dating behaviors and attitudes are socially constructed. Meanwhile, these three sections assisted me to explore the process of ethnic identities construction within the context of dating among the second-generation Chinese Americans, which would be the answers of the questions, I proposed in Aim 3.

## DATA ANALYSIS

Grounded theory approach was used to analyze the collected data (Strauss and Corbin 1998). Strauss and Corbin (1998) described grounded theory methodology (GTM) as a process that "the researcher begins with an area of study and allows the theory to emerge from the data" (p. 12). Theory was derived from data, which were systematically gathered and analyzed through the research process. In grounded theory, data collection, analysis, and eventual theory stand in close relationship to one another (Strauss and Corbin 1998). The grounded theory process begins with open coding, a "gathering" of indicators—ideas, behaviors, events, or expressions—which suggest categorical dimensions and conceptual themes. Through a process of open coding, I was able to identify concepts suggested by the indicators. Then I conducted axial coding by

organizing the concepts into categories and examine their dimensions and relationships. Finally, one or more core/focal categories emerged through axial coding. Thus, by comparing their levels of connections with other non-focal categories, I selected the one with the strongest link with others. The focal categories centrally related to the all other categories and then led to the creation of the theory.

Meanwhile, software for visual qualitative data analysis, ATLAS.ti, is applied to facilitate my data analysis. ATLAS.ti was designed to assist research to conduct qualitative analysis of large body textual and graphic data. In ATLAS.ti program, large size of textual data were coded at word, line, sentence, and/or paragraph levels for concepts, categories, connections, patterns, and themes. By using different functions of ATLAS.ti, data analysis went beyond the face value of the collected data in order to seek meaning and context for a better understanding and more complete answer to the research question. As a powerful workbench, ATLAS.ti has been commonly used by sociologists, anthropologists, and artists to analyze large bodies of textual, graphical, audio and video data. The major strengths of ATLAS.ti are as follow. First of all, it saved me a lot of time to deal with minute details. For example, ATLAS.ti has a function that can count the frequency of codes in less than 1 minute and show you the most frequent code in the data clearly. All of the codes are alphabetically ordered in the program. And I could find the codes, which appeared in earlier coding and analyzing phase. This function successfully refreshed my memories of earlier coding work and assisted me to make connections between early and later work. Second, all the codes, categories, memos, comments, and quotes are well organized in the program. Whenever you want to review your instant thoughts recorded in your memos or comments you made earlier, you can just go to the

coding list, find the codes or categories alphabetically, and then those memos and comments would be shown automatically on the screen. Third, by using ATLAS.it, it is very simple to conduct open coding, axial coding, and selective coding simultaneously. You can always establish connections and networks among codes, and then the software will memorize those connections and networks automatically. Whenever you need to review the codes or connections, you can just click on particular "output" buttons and then a detailed report will be generated in less than 1 minute. Overall, these are the main reasons that I chose to use ATLAS.ti to assist me organize and analyze the collected data.

Software is just a tool, which helped me to save a large amount time of doing physical work. It is still I, the researcher, who did all of the in-depth logical thinking, organization, and theory generation. As a researcher, I was in charge of the data, in control of the software, and utilized it to assist me to enhance and supplement my qualitative research skills. Generally speaking, I believe that Strauss and Corbin's grounded theory (1998) and ATLAS.ti program were successfully combined and integrated throughout the analyzing process of this study. This integration is demonstrated as follow.

To begin, I started the line-by-line open coding process by using ATLAS.ti program after I conducted and transcribed the first four interviews. Quickly, the analysis moved from indicators to categories. Meanwhile, by constantly comparing the indicators, I created as many dimensions (at least more than two dimensions) as possible from the categories. For example, one of my respondents said "he [my dad] is very very strict." This sentence was considered as an indicator to a category of "parental control." Meanwhile, I created several dimensions from this category based on the levels of

parental control. These dimensions are considered as concepts. As a result, a few themes emerged, such as parental control, patriarchy, age, etc.

With the knowledge, gained from the first set of data and the insight from "theoretical sampling," I was able to modify some of the interview questions in order to explore those developing themes more deeply and maximize opportunities to compare events, incidents, or happenings to determine how a category varies in terms of its properties and dimensions" (Strauss and Corbin 1998 p.202). After collecting all the data, I was able to draw insight, from both the initial data analysis and the experience of theoretical sampling. The open coding process, thus, moved quickly from indicators such as "curfew," "I am very Chinese," "I am a guy"and"scary parents" to categories[3] such as "Gender Role" and "Patriarchy" directly. Meanwhile, by constantly comparing the indicators, I created as many dimensions (at least more than two dimensions) as possible from the categories. These dimensions were considered as concepts, which were directly grouped and compared within categories.

After I finished all of the open coding, a few of the categories were considered theoretically saturated. For example, "Parental Influence," "Patriarchy," "Secrecy of Premarital Sex" and "Peer Influence" were the first few categories to become theoretically saturated. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), a category is considered "saturated" when no new information seems to emerge during coding, that is, when no more dimensions are seen in the data. In other words, "saturation is more a matter of reaching the point in the research where collecting additional data seems

[3] "Code" is the word used in ATLAS.ti program. It equals to the concept of "category," which is more often used in my studies.

counterproductive; the 'new' that is uncovered does not add that much more the explanation at this time" (p.136).

Simultaneously, axial coding and selective coding were progressing as well. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), the purpose of coding process is to relate categories and continue developing them in terms of their dimensions or concepts. Throughout the process of open coding, I constantly connected categories with each other and continued developing them in terms of their dimensions or concepts. After I finished all of the open coding, the connections within most of the theoretically saturated categories were established. After all levels of analysis, major themes emerged and several sub- themes are generated and connected under each major theme.

Meanwhile, "Situated Identity" emerged as the focal category during the analysis process. It related to all other categories easily and was very important to formulate the final theory. According to the code frequency report indicated by ATLAS.ti, "Situated Identity" emerged most often in the study. Other categories such as "Construction of Ethnic Identity," "Gendered Identity," and "Negotiation" appeared quite frequently as well. However, "Situated Identity" was the only one that can be connected to all the other categories emerged. I established a diagram to illustrate the connections between the major categories and the generation of final theory (Figure 1.).

Figure 1 demonstrates the main categories emerged through the coding process. Each category has several subcategories. For example, the categories of "Parental Influence" include "Confucianism," "Chinese patriarchy," "Secrecy of Premarital Sex," and "Parents' Attitudes toward Interracial Dating." Under each subcategory, there are several sub-subcategories. For example, "Filial Piety," "Emphasis on Education," "Influence

from Grandparents" and "Relations between Dating and Marriage" are under the category "Confucianism." Eventually, a hierarchal structure of the categories is established under each major category. However, only the interactions between the major categories are demonstrated in this figure, because they connect to the generation of the final theory more directly than those subcategories and sub-subcategories.

The arrows represent the direction of the relations between the two categories. In other words, not only does it capture the nature of on-going processes of social construction of ethnic identity, but it also demonstrates which categories are having an effect on subsequent categories. Figure 1 clearly demonstrates the interactions between the main categories. It is through constant "Negotiation" with "Parental Influence" and "Peer Pressure," and "Racialized Images" that second-generation Chinese American youths experience the process of constructing their ethnic identities. Some of the interactions are two-directional. As shown in Figure 1. on the one hand, second-generation Chinese American youths negotiate with racialized images of Chinese Americans, on the other hand, their construction of ethnic identities also reinforce or deny racialized images.

The interactions between categories "Family Expectations," "Peer Pressure," "Doing Gender," "Racialized Images," and "Construction of Gendered Ethnic Identity" are similar to the above pattern. Second-generation Chinese American youths construct their gendered ethnic identities through a process of doing gender across two cultural worlds, which are represented respectively by their family expectations and peer pressures, especially white peers.

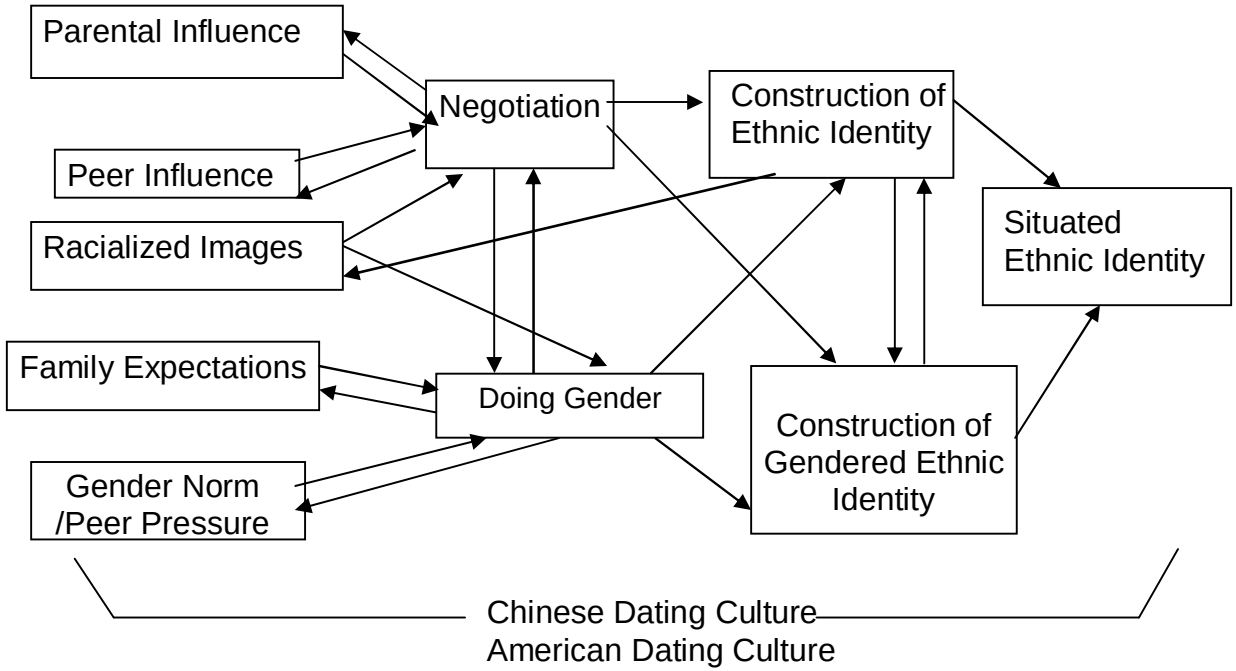
Strauss and Corbin (1998) clearly point out the important of exploring individuals'

agency, which are mainly reflected through individuals' strategies and tactics in grounded theory research. "Negotiation" and "Doing Gender" are the two main strategies emerging through the whole process of ethnic identity construction. Figure 1 also demonstrates the importance of the interactions between "Negotiation" of dating cultures and "Doing Gender." These two processes of negotiation interrelate with each other and lead to the construction of both ethnic identity and gendered ethnic identities. Finally, the combination of "Construction of Ethnic Identity" and "Gendered Ethnic Identity" leads to our focal category—"Situated Identity."

"Chinese Dating Culture" and "American Dating Culture" are the major cultural contexts. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), cultural contexts do not necessarily have causal relationships with the other categories. In this diagram, Chinese culture and American culture provide a large context for us to examine the social and cultural environment where second-generation Chinese American youths are embedded.

The main purpose of applying grounded theory is to explore the principle story (Strauss and Corbin 1998). To clearly illustrate the story of second-generation Chinese American youths' dating attitudes and behaviors, I present study findings by dividing the major themes into two chapters. Chapter 5, "Keepers of Chinese Culture," is structured based on the categories related to intergenerational negotiation of dating values. Chapter 6, "Social Construction of Self-Identities," is comprised the categories which deal with the symbolic meanings of dating, gender behaviors, and the related process of identity construction. The focal category "Situated Identity" is integrated throughout the whole findings section of the thesis.

**Figure 1. Diagram of Linkages and Final Theory**



# CHAPTER 5

# KEEPERS OF CHINESE DATING VALUES

> I am very Chinese. Like the way my parents raised me, we don't have American cable, we have Chinese cable. I have to take Chinese dancing class, and my parents make me speak Chinese.
>
> --Bebe (21, female, born in the United States)

## CONFUCIANISM

Within the context of Chinese American families, the relations between family members still bear a strong influence of the Chinese Confucian culture. The Confucian code of conduct defines a person's position, responsibilities, obligations, and morality within a hierarchal structure of society and family. As previous studies have shown, the structure of Chinese American families is grounded in ancient Confucian principles, which have been carried on and spread all over the world by generations and generations of Chinese.

### *Mommy and Daddy's Big Baby—Parental Control*

Traditionally, Chinese children—including adult offspring—are forbidden from expressing dissenting opinions or confronting parents, which is viewed as extremely disrespectful. In this study, most of the respondents, especially female respondents, expressed a strong sense of obedience and filial piety toward their parents and grandparents. Immigrant Chinese parents seemed to have exerted a great deal of parental control and authority over their children's daily life. When it came to dating or courtship, such parental control became extremely rigid. Bebe, 21, a second-generation Chinese American female, reflected that her father was so strict toward her, that she was often punished by her father in different ways, such as limiting her social activities or taking

away communication tools. As a result, in order to avoid any kind of conflicts with her father, she either hid her dates or simply gave up and listened to whatever he wanted her to do. In one incident, she described:

> One time, that was the first time I dated. He [her boyfriend] was a Korean. My dad didn't like him. He was a bad boy. He wasn't in school, and he doesn't really have a job. He was very very young. He always wanted me to go out late. And my dad found out, and I was grounded in the house for three months. I wasn't allowed to go anywhere. He took my cell phone, everything. My dad was like very very strict.

Shelley, female, 18, who was also born in the United States, had an even worse experience than Bebe with parents' authority and control. As she told me, her parents watched her daily behaviors and friends so closely that she felt smothered by her family environment. Her parents always "freaked out" by her attending dancing parties, phone calls, and other "small and normal things."

Compared to female respondents, the male respondents received much less parental control from their family, although they still felt a lot of pressure from their parents. They tended to feel that they had a relatively equal status with their parents at home. All of the 10 male respondents reflected that they felt much more liberated than their sisters or female cousins. Xiaoqing, male, 25, who immigrated to the United States at 8 years old, said, because he was a man and the oldest one in the family, his parents let him do whatever he wanted. When asked what it meant to be a man, he elaborated:

> You are more able to …I mean more liberated you know, being a guy. The family is more protective toward a girl. So it is more a….concerned about the girls than the guys. I don't think my parents do…I mean, they do care about me, but they give me freedom and let me do what I want to do.

In families where there were both teenage boys and girls, this gender difference appeared more evident. Jenny, 24, was always bothered by her mother's unequal attitudes

toward her and her brother. Jenny was not allowed to go out with her friends at night, but her brother always came back home after 12 o'clock without any restriction. Jenny was not allowed to date in high school, but her brother was encouraged by their parents to have a girlfriend because he would "stay away from trouble coz you don't hang out with friends that are bad."

Most of the respondents agreed that Chinese parents were overprotective toward daughters and more lenient toward sons. Sons could come home as late as they wanted and there were no questions and doubts from parents at all, while daughters always had curfews and received numerous questions from their parents to investigate all the details of their activities outside, especially if there were young men involved.

***How about Grandpa and Grandma?***

Chinese families often share the features of a strong nuclear family unit along with a strong commitment to the extended family. Filial piety tends to have stronger influence on the relationship between the immigrant generation and their parents than between second-generation Chinese American and the immigrant generation. Based on Confucianism, the care and financial support of aging parents, especially living in the same household with aging parents is highly valued. More than half of my respondents told me that they were living or had lived with their grandparents for a long period of time. Some respondents described that they had strong connections with their extended families. Sometimes, the grandparents had even more power than parents over the respondents' dating relationship or courtship. As Jenny described, her mother, who obtained a Master's degree in the United States, shifted from being "liberal" to more "conservative" after the grandparents moved in to their house. She believes this is

because her grandparents try to transfer their Chinese values to Jenny through her mother. She elaborated:

> I think because they [Jenny's grandparents] lived with us, their values transferred onto my mom, which transferred onto my brother and me. So my brother and I, even though we were born here, we can speak mandarin very well. You know, haha [laugh] because of that, and then the atmosphere is different. Maybe we didn't live with my grandparents; maybe my mom should be different. She speaks English very well. So in terms of education, employment, SES, she should be in the background that she is more liberal…you know…but when you had the added factor of older generation in your house, then you don't lose those traditional Chinese things.

However, Jenny's grandparents never directly meddled in Jenny's private affairs. They always exerted power and authority over Jenny's mom and expected her to pass their values on to their grandchildren. On the one hand, the grandparents successfully exerted their authority over their own children—Jenny's parents. On the other hand, they preserved the tradition of filial piety by not challenging Jenny's parents' authority over her.

Josh, male, 25, also told me some stories about how his grandparents spent so much energy introducing their friends' granddaughters to his cousin and himself. Although some of the respondents' grandparents did not live with their grandchildren, they still made great effort to exert control or influence over their grandchildren's dating or courtship. In order to exert their authority over the family from a long distance, they would seek support from their social and familial network in the United States, which were established during their life course.

The older generation's involvement in a nuclear Chinese family usually played a crucial role in the continuation and preservation of Chinese culture among the younger generations. Second-generation Chinese American children were more likely to

participate in Chinese activities and carry on Chinese language and customs when a grandparent lived in the same household. Eight out of 20 respondents complained that they were "forced" to go to a Chinese school during the weekend during their childhood because their grandparents expected them to be "Chinese." Fifteen respondents said that they celebrated Chinese traditional festivals and practiced Chinese customs at home with their extended family because this would make their grandparents "happier." Filial piety became an important practice that united the larger extended family together and regularly maintained Chinese custom and culture.

***School Goes First***

Confucian culture's great influence on education was also reflected in immigrant Chinese families. Chinese immigrant parents placed great importance on their children's education. Dating in High School and during the early years of college was highly supervised because Chinese parents worried that dating would take away time from school. When I asked my respondents, "What have your parents told you about dating or relationships?" More than half of them told me that their parents expected them not to date until they had graduated from high school or college. Dating was viewed by parents as an annoying distraction from their children's efforts in pursuing higher education and upward mobility. Among all of my respondents, dating was absolutely unacceptable during times of preparation for the SAT or other important exams.

Spending too much time dating was a major issue, which led to most of the conflicts between respondents and their parents in terms of dating. It was also the major reason that most of the respondents hid their dating relationships from their parents. In

response to my question—why he hid his relationship from his parents—Chang, male, 19, answered:

> Because I don't think they [my parents] will be that lenient. My first one I dated for 6 months. Because I've never dated before, I got scared. I thought they would be mad. It is mostly because of the expectation that my life should be. They would want me to concentrate on study. School goes first and stuff like that.

According to the respondents, their parents always considered high level of education and potential of being successful were the most important criteria for a date. All of the respondents recalled that their parents always investigated their dating partners' educational backgrounds. Their children's dating partner's educational and family background, which the parents considered as the key factor of their children's happiness in future, was one of the crucial criteria for their approval. Such a criterion was considered even more important among female respondents' parents. According to the parents, a well-educated man, a man with good family background, or an affluent man would ensure the potential of and quality for a good marriage. Lian, female, 23, explicitly explained to me how her parents easily approved of her relationship, simply because of her dating partner's background. She described:

> My current boyfriend is pretty well off, which is okay with them. And he is pretty smart; he is doing his Ph. D in aerospace engineering. I think either smart or wealthy family or something like that. They just want me to have a better future. And I guess I have better chance with a guy who has certain background.

Bebe, 21, told me a story of how her dad forced her sister to break up with a "contemporary unsuccessful" white male and arranged for her to date a well-educated Chinese man with a decent job. Compared to Lian, Bebe's sister experienced a heart-breaking period of time when she tried to weigh her respect for her father and her desire

to date the white boyfriend. Finally, she compromised with her father without complaining.

Similarly, parents' emphasis on dating partners' education and family background also applied to sons. Additionally, they would encourage their sons to work harder, "do well in academics," and pursue higher education because they thought young women were more attracted to men with good education and family backgrounds. Tao, 19, told me that his mother was very open-minded because she actually talked to him about dating when he was very young in high school. She attempted to help Tao understand his confusion of why he did not have a girlfriend unlike many of his white peers. She told him not to think about dating at this period of time and encouraged him to do well in academics because girls would be easily attracted to a well-educated man.

> She [my mom] always says you should do well in academics, do well in school, all of the girls will come after you.

***Dating is a Family Thing/Dating=Marriage?***

Dating was considered a serious thing for most of my respondents' parents. Getting married and establishing a family to carry on the family names was considered an important aspect of achieving happiness by the parents. Sara, female, 26, was hesitant to bring any of her dating partners home because her parents and even her large extended family would make a lot of assumptions about marriage and bearing children. As Sara and other respondents commented, "they made such a big deal of it, we are just dating. We are not so eager to get married soon." She said:

> They want us to be happy. They want us to have children, (laugh) grandchild. Especially my mom, she thinks things really far. Haha. Sometimes, if I tell them I am dating this person, she thinks far to grandchildren or whatever. That is the hesitation to bring someone back home because we have a big family. So if you bring someone home, then

> my grandmother will know, my uncle will know. Then they will make assumption, almost too much assumption, so it is not worthwhile to bring it up.

Most of my respondents had similar experiences as Sara. They reported that their parents made too many assumptions about dating that were often far from reality. In the parents' opinion, dating was considered a family issue because it was almost equal to marriage. Subsequently, they treated their children's dating so seriously, they would always "conduct an in-depth, annoying investigation" as soon as they found out that their children were dating someone. More than half of the respondents hid their dating relationship from their parents because they were afraid of their parents' investigation. As a result, a lot of my respondents told me that they would not bring anyone back home to meet their parents if they were not either highly committed to their dating partners or viewed them as having potential for marriage.

Xiaoqing, male, 26, made some insightful comments about his understanding of Chinese values toward dating and marriage. He said that there were "a bunch of rules that they (his parents) confine to." Finding a partner, for his parents' generation, was more like how compatible they were with each other, how they fit each other, how their family felt about the other's family. Finding a partner was very much a "business proposition type of thing." As he said, the first thing his parents did whenever they knew he was dating someone was to compare their own family background with that of his dating partners' family background in order to see how compatible they were. The meaning of dating became more like "family business" than individual choice. The interest and background of the family were valued higher than individual's preference. Ever since his first date, Xiaoqing, never told his parents anything about his dating experiences. But his parents always had a way to find out. Then his parents would treat

it as “a big deal, not as it really is.” The parents would consider every girl that Xiaoqing went out with as a potential for marriage and asked him numerous questions of the girls’ backgrounds.

As we see, Confucianism played an important role in shaping the intergenerational relationships within Chinese American families. By relating dating to parental authority, education, and marriage, the parents attempted to exert great control over their second-generation children’s private life.

## PATRIARCHY—GENDER ROLES WITHIN THE FAMILY

### *“He is a Dad. He doesn’t Talk as a Mom”*

Based on all of my 20 interviews, I found that a gendered division of household chores was a very common phenomenon. Although most of the mothers had college educations, they were still the ones doing most of the housework. Eight respondents told me similar stories of how their mothers worked so hard both outside and inside the home day and night, while their fathers could just watch TV and relax after coming home from work.

When it came to talks about dating or parents’ opinion on dating, the mother was always the one who did most of the talking. When asked —“What have your parents talked to you about dating or relationships,” the most common answer is—“My dad is very quiet. My mom, on the other hand …” Qing, female, 18 and Maureen, female, 18, amazingly had the same impressions of their parents’ roles at home. Their fathers would help them with coursework and independent school projects, but they never taught them how to deal with emotions, dating, or friendship.

Obviously, "talking to kids about dating" was defined by most of the respondents' parents as an "emotional topic." Mothers were the ones who handled all of dating lectures and set all of the dating rules. Bebe's father was the only male who talked to his daughters about dating and set all of the restrictions and curfews. This was simply because Bebe's mother passed away a long time ago. However, as Bebe commented, he did not talk as often as a mother does.

> My mom passed away a long time ago. It is my dad, who talks to me…, but not very often…maybe once four months or once a year or something like that. He is a dad. He doesn't really talk that often as a mom, unless I bring it up.

It is noted that dating was clearly defined as an emotional topic. Talking about dating was identified as mother's work. Such gendered attitudes toward dating deeply affected most of the respondents' dating attitudes and behaviors, especially their understanding of gender roles in a dating relationship. I discuss this topic more fully in the following chapters.

## SECRECY OF PREMARITAL SEX

### *"Once you Lose Something, You Can't Have It Back."*

Sex was a word rarely used word in my respondents' homes. Discussion of sex was taboo, talked only in secrecy in Chinese American families. As Sara, female, 26, stated, "I think in Asian culture, you just don't talk about sex with your kids." The respondents' parents never sat down and talked about sexuality seriously and openly with their children. However, they had their own special ways of expressing their opinions or rules. Chinese parents chose hints, implication, and jokes to pass their attitudes on to their children. Of course, the mothers usually played the role of communicating these

expectations. Sara's parents would give books to her but "never speak out about it." Bebe's father would give various hints. Bebe gave me some examples:

> He [my father] is not very open. He kind of hints it to us. He will say, you can go out play, but you have to play consciously. Be careful about how to play. There is something once you lose, you can't have it back. He says something like that. He just doesn't come out and says, "Keep your virginity." He doesn't talk like that.

Among all of the respondents' parents, there were different levels of acceptance toward premarital sex. Some parents would directly avoid the topic and never talked about it. A few parents would warn their children of the negative consequence of premarital sex by giving innuendos. There were also two respondents' parents who gave silent permission for premarital sex and passed books to educate their children about sexual health. Such differentiation had a lot to do the parents' education levels and their majors. The parents who had higher levels of education and were in arts or social science majors tended to be more accepting of premarital sex. On the other hand, those who studied in science or business majors or that had less education were more conservative about it. Jason's mother, who ran a Chinese restaurant in her whole life, was a typical example of the "conservative" parent who viewed sexuality as a shameful thing to talk about. Jason told some stories of how his mother warned his sisters of the negative consequence of sex:

> When we were growing up, my mom always tried to hide sex. When we watched a movie, when there is some sort of sex parts, she would fast forward it. I was like…I don't know what the hell this is. It shouldn't be like that.

***Trust Versus "We Want You to be Clean."***

Daughters and sons shared a lot of similarities in terms of how their parents avoided talk about sex and how they treated it as a big secret. However, it appeared that

there were remarkable differences between immigrant parents' attitudes towards daughters and sons. Parental control on the issue of premarital sex for daughters was much stricter than for sons. Silence was the typical tactic used by parents with their sons. For daughters, the parents used a variety of hints to warn them the dangers of having premarital sex.

A high degree of freedom and trust was the most common attitude that male respondents received from their parents. The males' parents were confident that their sons could make capable decisions on their own. Young men had much higher levels of autonomy to do whatever they wanted. It is because that the parents believed that biologically men would not be trapped in a disadvantaged situation such as a pregnancy. Xiaoqing, male, 26, concisely pointed out the gendered attitudes of premarital sex among Chinese parents in these words:

> No. They never talked to me [about premarital sex]. They give me the freedom to do whatever I think is good. I know that. Again, it doesn't matter that much coz I am a guy. (Interviewer: What is the difference from a girl?) A girl is definitely different. Especially, I definitely see…in Chinese culture, the ideal of the first one (the first sexual experience) for husband is very important for girls.

Jason's parents were an example of conservative parents who avoided discussing sexual topics with their children. However, Jason's parents gave him unspoken permission for premarital sex. They continued to keep silent on the topic of sex even though they were aware of the fact that their son stopped sleeping at home and instead slept in his girlfriend's apartment. However, for Jason's sister Sheila, the parents were never lenient. They established a bunch of rules to keep her from having premarital sex. When Sheila started going out with men, they constantly warned her that "he is just a guy, you know what he wants." As Jason told me, his parents would "get pissed" when

Sheila came home late because they were afraid that their daughter would be in danger of having sex with her boyfriend. Sheila was not the only one whose sexuality has been guarded by immigrant parents so closely. Tina, 21, told me that from 10th grade on, her mother constantly warned her of the negative consequences of premarital sex. "Don't be too casual," "don't be so easy to be chased," and "we want you to be clean," were the most common statements from their parents. Guarding their daughters' virginity and protecting them from the risks of being pregnant were directly related to their families' reputation.

The parents, especially the mothers, could always come up with strategies to exert their control over their daughter. On the one hand, they were able to avoid talking about "sex." On the other hand, they were also able to make sure that their children could easily read between the lines and follow the implied rules. Such hints were a mix of intimidating warnings and jokes. Maureen's mother told her that if she "does that thing, she will get cancer." Tina's mother told her "that is a treasure for girls." Jenny's mother even threatened to "throw you (Jenny) out of the house if those kinds of things (sex) happen on you."

There were also a few parents who talked about premarital sex openly and viewed it as an unavoidable phenomenon. They tried to provide sex education for their children. Elaine's mother actually told Elaine about her experience with premarital sex in China. Although Elaine's mother forced Elaine's father to marry her because he took her virginity, after she realized how common premarital sex was in the United States, she tried to teach Elaine some methods of birth control.

## FAMILY ATTITUDES TOWARD INTERRACIAL DATING

### *We Want You to Meet Someone Who is Chinese*

Most of the respondents' parents never explicitly expressed their attitudes toward interracial dating to their children. Similar to premarital sex, the topic of interracial dating is also a taboo in Chinese families. Some parents would keep silent for a long time until the moment they found out their child was dating someone who was not of Chinese descent. Automatically, they would relate it directly to interracial marriage and tell their children that "we want you to meet a Chinese." Also, some parents would claim that they were accepting of interracial dating; however, they would imply or joke about their preference for Chinese people. Qing and Tina's parents always made jokes about how strange it would be to give their grandchildren family names, if they dated people from other race and ethnic groups. As a result, on the one hand, most of the respondents who had not dated interracially or who had not told their parents about their interracial dating were confused about their parents' attitudes toward interracial dating. On the other hand, they could easily tell that their parents' preference for people of a Chinese background. Hakuna, 24, who had never dated anyone, described the information he received from his parents regarding interracial dating.

> I don't know. Probably, I am pretty sure they want us to stay Chinese, or other East Asian. Same race, I think, in general. I don't know. I don't know. Maybe [because] we grew up here, I guess they want us to reach back to our roots, to understand our culture, our way of life…that is why [they want me to stay Chinese]. I guess. Just keep it as pure [as possible], pure Chinese, in term of culture, the way of life, the way how people think, I guess they want us to explore that.

During my interview with Jenny, she told me that she had recently had a big fight with her mother because she was dating a second-generation Korean man rather than a

Chinese person. Nobody in Jenny's family had married anyone outside of a Chinese background. Jenny had been dating her Korean boyfriend for four years since her second year in college. Right before she moved to Atlanta from California, two months before the interview, her mother warned Jenny that she could not date him because he was Korean and not Chinese. Jenny's mother told her straightforward, "we want you to marry a Chinese." And then Jenny's mother started introducing her Chinese friends' sons to her, trying to arrange her marriage. Jenny was not the only one who was facing such conflicts with parents. Although most of the parents claimed that they were okay with interracial dating, most of the female respondents reported that their parents always indirectly implied that they would like them to date someone who had a Chinese background or more specifically, a Taiwanese or Mainland Chinese background.

However, although most of the female respondents were warned by their parents not to date anybody outside of Chinese descent, all of them had dated or were dating non-Chinese men. Seven out of 10 female respondents had dated or were currently dating white men. All of the ten female respondents had dated or were currently dating men with an East Asian background. "Hiding and catching games" were played again and again between the females respondents and their parents. When Shelley had just started dating a Korean male, she told her mother about it because her mother was the one who she talked to when she had confusion about her emotional life. However, after Shelley's mother told her father about it, they tried to stop her from talking to and seeing the Korean boyfriend. Shelley explained to me, "Because he is Korean, they still have a little bias among the older generations." But Shelley dated the Korean boyfriend anyway and the hiding and catching began. Shelley told me that cell phones and Internet messengers

were the most common hiding tactics she and her female friends used to avoid direct conflicts from their parents.

For the male respondents, parents were much more lenient. Happiness, instead of preserving Chinese tradition, which had always been the greater pressure on Chinese women, emerged as the major concerns of the male respondents' parents. Although the parents might feel more comfortable to communicate with females from a Chinese background, they would not take any actions if their sons were dating females from other racial or ethnic backgrounds. Hiding games were barely played by many of male respondents. They would either tell their parents directly or just simply let their parents find out about the relationship. Hiding was not one of the tactics used by male respondents in dealing with their parents.

***What is More Important? Chinese or Money?***

Lain, female, 23, was in a serious dating relationship with a white man. In the past, similar to most of the female respondents' parents, Lain's mom claimed that as long as her daughter was happy, she did not have racial preference for her daughter's dating partners. But actually, her actions of encouraging her to attend Chinese events and meet other Chinese men did reveal her preference for Chinese. However, Lain told me that her mother was quite supportive of her relationship with a white man. Ever since Lain's mother was informed of Lain's boyfriend's education and family background, her mother's attitudes toward this relationship changed dramatically. In other words, a wealthy family background could overcome racial preference.

> I know they prefer that I date somebody from China, from my city [Shanghai]. So they can probably understand better and they can communicate with them better. But I know that my parents definitely prefer the guys with a good family background. (Thinking for a while) my

> current boyfriend is pretty well off, which is okay with them. And he is pretty smart; he is doing his PhD in aerospace engineering. I think either smart or wealthy family or something like that. They just want me to have a better future. And I guess I have better chance with a guy who has certain background.

Lain's mother was not the only one who favored good family background over racial preferences for Chinese. Most of the female respondents reported that their parents were more accepting toward their dating partners from other ethnic groups who had a high level of education and good family background than Chinese guys who "have nothing else but the label of 'being a Chinese'." However, if there were a possibility that their daughter could meet a "successful" Chinese young man, their Chinese preference would be emphasized again.

Most of the respondents reported that their parents automatically assumed that Chinese interracial dating only happened between Chinese women and white men. Chopin, female, 23, told me some similar stories about how her mother actually liked her to date whites, because the baby would be more white-like, which was viewed as "pretty and cute." When replying to my question about her mother's opinion of interracial dating, she said:

> She is fine about it…she actually likes it…she actually like if I date [whites]. Not black…but white. [So] that the baby would be tall and white. She didn't encourage that, [but] she didn't oppose if I do date a white guy. She might say, she couldn't talk to him in Chinese. She doesn't say, oh… you have to date a Chinese guy. [But] I know she might prefer Chinese guy.

Dating African Americans was implicitly forbidden by most of the respondents' parents. Most of the respondents explained that as a preference issue rather than racial issue. As Xiaoqing pointed out, "it is just preference. Has nothing to do with racism." He

also pointed out that dating white was much more acceptable than dating African American in Chinese community.

This Chapter examined how the parents of second-generation Chinese American respondents tried to preserve dating values in terms of dating, premarital sex and interracial dating. Based on the values of Confucianism and Chinese patriarchy, Chinese immigrant parents attempted to assert the superiority of Chinese dating values and preserve the purity of Chinese-ness. Would the second-generation Chinese American youths simply accept or resist to their parents' values of dating? To what extent would the patterns of dating attitudes be particularly "Chinese" among second generation Chinese American youths? What information about dating do they receive from American culture? How do Chinese youths view their dating patterns as similar to or different from those of mainstream American youths? I will provide answers to these questions in the next chapter: Social Construction of Self-Identities.

# CHAPTER 6

# SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF SELF IDENTITY

During the interviews, the majority of the respondents constantly interchanged the words "white" and "Caucasian" with "American." They excluded other racial minority groups such as African Americans and Latino Americans from their definition of "Americans." Indeed, for them, American dating was white dating. Additionally, when I asked them about their understanding of American dating, all of the respondents automatically offered me comparisons between Chinese and white cultures regarding dating. Obviously, in the respondents' opinion, Chinese and American cultures were two fundamentally different or even oppositional cultures.

## PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES TOWARD AMERICAN DATING

### *Americans Want to Play*

All of the respondents agreed that Americans started dating at a much younger age, changed dating partners more often, and had a lower degree of commitment than second generation Chinese Americans. They perceived that in American culture, people would not be viewed negatively if they started dating at an early age or changed dating partners often.

All of the respondents drew a clear line between Chinese and American dating. "Americans are very open." "Chinese are old fashioned and conservative." Commitment was the major criterion that the respondents used to set the boundary between the two cultures. It appeared that all of the respondents agreed upon the statement "Americans have less commitment." A lack of exclusiveness, low level of emotional attachment, and an absence of orientation for marriage were the common impressions that most of the

respondents perceived about their American friends' dating. "Americans date very casually. If they like it, they do it. They can date more than one person at the same time." In contrast, in their opinion, Chinese were more concerned about love and a long-term relationship. Chang clearly pointed out:

> Chinese people are more conservative. A lot of my white friends are more open to this topic than my Chinese friends. They are more likely to participate [in dating]. I think Chinese are more conservative to even talk about it. I think Chinese are more concerned about love…more concerned about having a relationship. They want to be with each other for a long time. But for white people, they can just be with each other just like one month.

In their opinion, not only did the Americans have short-term relationship, they also dated just for fun or experience. On the contrary, the Chinese always had the potential for marriage in the back of their mind when they dated someone.

Besides a lack of commitment, there was also a deficiency of formalities in American dating. Jenny interpreted formality as a strict connection between family and dating. Different from Chinese families, which played the role of being a third party in second-generation Chinese American dating or relationships, Americans or whites had the autonomy to date whoever they wanted. "For whites, dating is more like a personal thing and for Asians, dating is more like a family thing," as Jenny explained. Because Americans did not look into the future, there was less thought about whether the individual's family matched his family. Jenny took having dinner with dating partners' parents as an example to explain the lack of formalities in American dating:

> If I am going to have dinner with his [my boyfriend's] parents, it is very formal. It means something. It is like "oh, you are gonna bring her home to see your parents." Well, for others, maybe white Americans, oh, just come over, come for thanksgiving, or you know…go shopping with my sister, it is not so much this is the family, this is someone else. It is more

> open. For my understanding, I think for White, dating is more like a personal thing and for Asians, dating is more like a family thing.

Apparently, Jenny implied that meeting parents in Chinese dating would be a big deal because it would move the relationship to the next step with a higher level of commitment. However, for Americans, they would just introduce their parents casually to their dating partners. Bebe was "petrified" when she met his white boyfriend's parents the first time because for her parents should be highly respected according to the way her parents raised her. However, for Bebe's boyfriend, who was white, it was not "a big deal" to introduce his girlfriend to his parents because parents were treated as friends instead of authorities. Therefore, there was no implication of a higher level of commitment behind his action. For Bebe, treating parents as friends would be considered as morally wrong according to Chinese family values. In response to my question: "Why did his parents petrified you?" Bebe explained:

> Because that is the way my parents raised me. As nice as his parents would be, but they are still parents, they are still gonna scared me. Because they are parents, regardless of their nice, you still have to respect them and be in a different kind of… the way I am talking to you, I am not gonna talk to my boyfriends' parents like that, coz that is just wrong. You have to prepare for that.

In comparison with Chinese dating, American dating was generally considered by the respondents to be recreation-oriented with a high degree of autonomy. Second-generation Chinese American youth drew a clear boundary between their perceptions of the two cultures. By differentiating American dating from Chinese dating in terms of the levels of commitment and formalities, second-generation Chinese American youth perceived American dating culture or values as oppositional to Chinese dating culture.

***They Know They are Gonna Break Up***

Most of the respondents had the perception that Americans dated with less commitment and formality. However, their attitudes toward this pattern of "American dating" differed. Some respondents, who viewed commitment as a prerequisite of dating, held negative attitudes towards American dating. Other respondents, who did not consider commitment as prerequisite of dating, had a positive perception of American dating. Their comments on American dating were made through comparisons with their own dating values.

Xiaoqing expressed a positive point of view toward American dating with lesser degrees of commitment. For him, American dating was more special and emotional because people did not have to be together just for "being together." He believed that, "Being together" did not necessarily mean "being happy with each other," breaking up could be a good solution for problems. In Xiaoqing's opinion, "commitment" blocked people from seeking "happiness" because people would be forced to be together because of "commitment." He highly valued a lower level of commitment that gave Americans autonomy and license to break up with their dating partners and move on to other dates and thus make themselves happy. Casual dates gave people chances to know people and express emotions naturally than "being stuck in a committed relationship." He described:

> It [American dating] is more liberal. People change partners more. I think it is more special and emotional than anything else. It is not like that they have to keep it together because they want it to work out. It is more like they are not happy together so they break up.

In contrast to Xiaoqing's positive point of view of American dating, Bebe had serious criticisms of American dating by comparing her values reagrding American casual dating. One of her arguments was that American dating was superficial and immature that

Americans focused on so much on appearance and dated just for fun. She considered herself more mature because she looked toward the future and kept the potential of marriage in her mind on her dates.

> I kind of have standard. I am pickier than Americans. For them [Americans], everything they want is based on looks now. For me, it is kind of I am more toward to the future, Like if he has the potential or something. I don't think that one day or one date that he takes care of me… that is kind of pointless. You know…I think they just do that for fun…I think I am more mature …

Similarly, Chang commented that American values of dating were too "casual" and they were "bad." He was conscious of the existence of these values, which were totally different from the way he and his Chinese friends dealt with relationships. According to him, his Chinese friends had long-term relationships and were willing to make efforts to make relationships work. However, for his white friends, "once it [arguing] happens, then it [the relationship] is over."

Interestingly, during the interview, Chang also clarified that not all Caucasians were too casual. After sharing their comments on American dating, some of the respondents took one step back and tried to avoid making stereotypes about Americans. According to Shelley, some of her American friends who had commitment were "really good because they were rare."

Most of the respondents did not explicitly present their attitudes toward American dating, however, they did make it clear that "I am different from them." Tina joked that there was no way that she would date like an American because "it is just so awkward to see somebody else at the same time." Shelley clearly differentiated herself from her American friends. She said:

> I think they date with the knowledge or knowing that they are gonna break up with the person eventually. They kind of expect that this is gonna be a short relationship. I think when I date, I don't expect it to be short, I just expect it to keep going until either marriage, or something really doesn't work…

***It Is a Big Deal If You Don't Do It***

Openness toward sexuality was also considered another main distinction between Chinese and American dating culture. "For Chinese, it is a big deal if you do it. But for Americans, It is a big deal if you don't do it." All of the respondents shared a similar idea that Americans were open on the topic of sex and sex was an important part of dating. Qing, female, 18, described making out in public and "doing other things" (having sex) as the two major characteristics of American dating. Jenny also gave me the impression she had about American dating.

> They go out, have dinner, and then they probably go somewhere drinks, and then I don't know, they watch a movie or they watch a show, or they go to somewhere else to a club or something, and they go home and have sex.

Because sex was such an important part of American dating, most of the respondents observed that Americans faced a lot of peer pressure to have sex at an early age. As Elaine stated, "actually, people [Americans] get embarrassed when people say they are virgin, especially guys." All of the respondents realized that American culture was sexually oriented. Not having sex was considered unacceptable among their American peers. Having sex with different people was considered as "something to be proud of" by Americans. Different from Chinese people's focus on emotional attachment and intention for long-term commitment, Americans had sex in order to be accepted in their culture. Elaine told me the different attitudes toward sex between her fiancée, who was a Chinese, and the American boyfriend she dated before:

> My boyfriend is a Chinese. He only dated a few girls. And he doesn't go around and sleep with people like that. He only had sex with people he had long relationship with. But the American guys I have dated, was like they have partners only for sex, not even in a relationship or dating. They call it booty calls. Stuff like that…Asians, I don't think they are this much. There are, but not as much. Especially, they won't talk openly about it. If they have booty calls, I don't think they would announce it to the world. Americans think it is something to be proud of. "Oh, I have so many booty calls."

Apparently, based on the respondents' observations, for some Americans, sex was separated from commitment and valued as a "cool" thing for them to seek social acceptance. High school was considered as the time that Americans started having sex. Some respondents recalled the widespread gossip of sex in high school. "They talked about it all the time." Shelley told me that in the beginning she was so shocked when she heard her white friends actually hid in theaters and had sex. After a while, she noticed that that was common in high school and then she just got used to those gossip. Distinctly, Chinese and other Asian people would maintain silence on sexual topics and had no response to the gossip.

Similar to her negative comments toward the lack of commitment in American dating, Bebe criticized the way Americans rushed into having sex as immature. In her opinion, "finding the right person," in other words, commitment and potential for marriage, should be valued as the key motivation for sex. Jenny, who obtained a Master's degree in Public health, was also surprised by how fast teenagers grow in this country. "The teenage girls now, they become more and more promiscuous." She pointed out that in this sexually oriented society, American girls were taught to be sexy at an early age. She commented on the ways Asian girls and white girls dressed differently and viewed sex differently.

> I think one thing. You want to compare Asian and white mainstream among my cohort. I think that there is expectation that American women and girls are very sexually appealing. American girls have to look nice, make up, and blah, blah, blah. But for Asian Americans, it is like being sexy or being just when you go clubbing, is being a ho. They are like…these are my hoey friends. Even when we go to Vegas, we go clubbing, we bought our hooey clothe to go clubbing. But to us, it is very like, clothes are more revealing than what we regularly wear. And my parents would be mad at us if they ever seen I wear that. But then I see, like white Americans, their moms are going to those stores and buy those same clothe. The mom would say, oh, that is really cute, and you should wear that suit. I think that is the one difference. For Asians, you can't be overtly like, express your sexuality and your femininity. But for mainstream, it is you should show those things.

The male respondents also perceived such a sexual orientation in mainstream culture. American's openness toward sex was also reflected in the society's acceptance toward women's initiation of sex. Josh shared a similar opinion with Jenny, he said, in American culture, sex was so open and all the images of women around were sexual. Therefore, even though men would initiate sex more in American mainstream culture, "women would agree rapidly." Shelley also joked, "girls are not exactly unwilling with it." Distinctly, Asian girls' sexuality was closely related to their morality. Initiating sex would result in a bad reputation for an Asian girl in her community. As Chang explained:

> I think it [initiating sex] is more okay for American girls. But for Asian girls, or Japanese, Chinese, Korean, if the girl initiates it or even talk about it a lot, and then it will cause a bad image of the girl. If a lot of people know that girl initiates sex and talked about it a lot, and then people would think she is morally corrupted. Haha…. morally corrupted, yeah, morally corrupted.

Based on the respondent's comparisons between American and Chinese culture, a Chinese girl's sexuality was strongly tied to her reputation. Furthermore, it was also closely related to not only their parents and, but whole family. Because American culture was sexually oriented, girls would be encouraged to be sexually appealing and thus have

more autonomy over their own bodies and sexuality. Those American values would be viewed as deviant and socially unacceptable in Chinese culture. Again, Chinese and American dating values were considered completely oppositional by second-generation Chinese Americans in the aspects of premarital sex.

***Chinese Gender vs. American Gender***

Similarly, second-generation Chinese Americans' perceptions of gender issues in American dating were also constructed on the basis of comparison with Chinese or Asian values. As we discussed in previous chapter, who initiates the first date and who pays the cost of the date are the two major lenses through which I examined gender perceptions.

Although the respondents agreed that in both American and Chinese dating cultures, men were the one who initiates, American women played a much more active role in initiating the first date than Chinese girls. Chang was the one who complained that he never saw any Chinese girls initiate the first date. But among his white peers, he said men would initiate about 60% of dates, and women about 40%.

"American girls are very brave," was the most common comment the respondents, especially female respondents, made. Bebe used an interesting word to describe American girls—"boy-crazy." "Asian girls aren't as boy-crazy as the American girls." She came up with an interesting scenario when an American girl and Chinese girl met a "cute guy," as Bebe explained, their responses would be totally different:

> The American girl would be like "oh…my god…he is so cute. Give him my number!" and the Asian girls are like "uh…he is cute. Uh…maybe next time we see him, we should initiate some to try to get him to come over here and start a friendship or something." The American girls…oh…go get their numbers…they are very brave.

Bebe actually tried to learn how to initiate a date from her American friends. She thought she was just too shy to do that. Similarly, Bebe also considered American men to be more brave and confident than Asian men. Although most of the Asian men considered initiating the first date as the man's responsibility, they would still be viewed as shy and not as brave as American men.

The respondents used positive words such as confident and brave to describe their American peers in terms of initiating the first date. According to their answers, those qualities were just what Chinese people, especially Chinese women, lacked. American patterns of initiating the first date were constructed as a positive image among the respondents.

In terms of who pays the cost for the date, all of the respondents reported that American followed the rules of splitting the cost or sharing the financial responsibility of dating. Except on the first date, men would probably pay for the women. Chris, male, 20, strongly felt the cultural difference between his Chinese family and his American peers:

> The way I get it is that Chinese people always try to offer to pay. For example, two families go for dinner; they would fight for the bills. But Americans, I told one of my American friends that I paid everything. He said, are your crazy, man. My girl always pays bills for me. So I think Americans are more comfortable with that. Chinese people are more into those traditions.

As far as paying the cost for the date, it seemed that there was a variation among the respondents' comment on American peers' way. There were a few respondents who thought American women and men were treated more equally on a date. As Sara commented, "They are more fair." Sara said dating with a Caucasian guy opened her eye to see the independence of women.

However, there were also some respondents who had a negative view on the American practice of sharing financial responsibility of dating. Elaine directly told me that one of the most important reasons that she preferred dating Asian men to American men was because Asian men would offer to pay while American men only paid their own half. She explained that because Asian men paid most of the cost, she would have a feeling of being protected and taken good care of. She felt more comfortable with men paying the dating cost, so she stopped going out with American men.

> Chopin's comments on American men were even more negative than Elaine. As she said, "American guys are a lot cheaper than Chinese guys." In her opinion, Chinese men are more generous than American guys because Chinese men would pay for their dating partners' friends while American men would just take care of their own bills. Additionally, she stated that although American men would pay for their partners on the first date, they were less "gentlemenly" than Chinese men because American men expected a lot in return from their dating partners.

Based on these responses, Chinese and American dating cultures are in opposition. What Chinese would not do was exactly what Americans would do. Furthermore, I also observed a variation within the respondents' attitudes toward American dating and gender roles. There were both noticeable positive attitudes and negative attitudes among them. Such a variance reflected different levels of acceptance of American dating culture among second-generation Chinese American youth.

## ESCAPE FROM CHINESE IDENTITY IMPOSED BY THEIR PARENTS

### *Would You Rebel?*

When describing their attitudes toward their parents' dating values, most respondents provided at least one negative account. They criticized their parents for lacking American values or ideologies such as openness and an emotion-orientation toward dating. Respondents repeatedly constructed Chinese families as strict, close-minded, and

practical. “Scary,” “weird,” “difficult” and “funny” are the most common words with negative meanings the respondents used to comment on Chinese traditions, which were practiced by their immigrant parents. Jenny argued that the ideal role for parents should be one in while they are open and easy to communicate with. As she explained, Chinese parents apparently have difficulty achieving this role.

Jenny implied that American parents are more open or “ideal” than Chinese parents. Xiaoqing stated that because there was a lack of Western ideology of finding the right person and being open, Chinese tradition was weird and scary to him. Arranged marriage and the material orientation of Chinese dating were the two main things in Chinese culture that Xiaoqing felt strongly uncomfortable with. When I asked respondent what they thought about Chinese traditions, Xiaoqing replied:

> Chinese traditions are a little scary to me. I mean, especially the long history. I think it is pretty weird now, but it was actually very normal, like it used to be like arranged marriage. Like any type of relationships should be under supervision. Uh…like any type of marriage and to be consenting by, not only by themselves, but also by their families. That is pretty much the tradition. They can’t easily say I want to break up or I want to do this or I want to do that. They don’t…once they get in a relationship, no matter how good it is or how bad it is, that is secondary to the image of the rest of the society. Because things would get worse, people start making rumors, everybody would talk about them.

Arranged marriage or matchmaking, which was considered an important component of Chinese courtship values, was harshly criticized by most of the respondents. Chang thought it was very funny that his grandparents tried to arrange someone to him.

I heard a lot of laughs during the 20 interviews. Most of the laughs were from the jokes respondents made about their parents. They laughed about how close-minded and stubborn their parents were in terms of their attitudes towards interracial dating. They

laughed about how funny the hints their parents used to warn them not to have premarital sex were. Elaine shared some details of her family with me:

> My grandmom, when it comes to sex, she is very close-minded. So she's never talked about it because she thinks it is disgusting. Even with her own husband, she thinks it is disgusting. It is so funny. And it is also weird that, both my grandparents and parents, they don't live in the same room. They live in separate rooms. My grandmother hasn't lived with my grandfather for a long time. They are not very intimate at all from what I see. My parents, ever since my mom had my sister, they haven't been intimate at all either…it is like a traditional…hahaha…I don't wanna end up like that. hahaha….

Most of the respondents held a negative point of view toward their parents and grandparents' values because they conflicted with their construction of what family should be. As a result of those negative attitudes toward Chinese dating values, most of the respondents felt that they could not communicate with their parents and were not willing to share their dating experiences with their parents. Nineteen out of 20 respondents never actively informed their parents when they were on dates or involved in relationships. Also, when they had problems with their dating partners, most of the respondents would come to their friends to seek help instead of talking to their parents. Clearly, the respondents differentiated themselves from her immigrant parents. Throughout the process of differentiating herself from her parents, Jenny unconsciously constructed her own identity opposite to her parents' identity—"Chinese."

***"Girls Take Parents Seriously, Guys Just Do Whatever."***

It was interesting that although all the respondents had similar negative comments on their parents' values of dating, the male and female respondents evidenced different levels of obedience toward their parents' control. When I asked the respondents whether they would hide their dating partners from their parents, a gendered pattern emerged from

their answers. Most of the female respondents answered "yes" and further explained how much effort they needed to make to block any possibilities their parents would find out about their dating relationships. They complained that they had to constantly lie to their parents in order to keep their dating a secret. In contrast, although most of the male respondents were annoyed by their parents' investigations and chose not to tell their parents, they would not make as much effort as the female respondents to cover their dating relationships. "Guys would take it easy and just wait until their parents to find out." Where did such a distinct gender difference come from? Based on his observations of how he and his sister dealt with their parents, Jason succinctly pointed out "girls take parents seriously, guys just do whatever." He remarked:

> Because I think my sister takes my parents more seriously. For me and for most of my friends, we don't take our parents that seriously. For example, my mom would comment on girls, and say this girl doesn't do this and this girl doesn't do that, you know whatever…I would say, come on, mom, this is bullshit. This is kind of stupid. But my sister would listen to her if she were talking about guys. And she would be thinking, would my mom like my ex-boyfriend in HS? Would my mom like my boyfriend I am dating now? She takes it, very seriously. When I listen to my mom talk, it is kind like you used to your very good friends talk, you are not gonna believe them. You listen to them…okay, this makes sense…but you won't…that is not gonna control what you do. So with my mom and my father, in terms of my relationship, it is kind of same thing. I am not afraid of what they say.

Jason believed that in terms of how he dealt with his parents, he was more "Americanized" than women because he just simply treated his parents as friends rather than as an authority. He would not let his parents' opinion direct or control his behavior. Because he considered his parents as friends, he had the freedom of whether or not to take their advice. However, in contrast, women would be always afraid to take anyone back home because they took parents' opinion seriously and made every effort not to

violate their parents' authority. Bebe would simply give up a relationship if her parents did not like her partners. For her, parents were considered as the authority and their opinions would be highly respected. "If my parents don't like them, naturally I will start moving feeling too."

However, not every female respondent was as obedient as Bebe, who would easily compromise with her parents. A lot of female respondents continued hiding games and strived for autonomy. During the interview, Jenny was on her way to persuade her parents to permit her relationship with her Korean boyfriend. "This is the first time I decided that I am not gonna listen to my parents." Constantly arguing with her mother brought a lot of stress for her because she "took her parents seriously and felt conflicted all the time." College became an important turning point when some women would confront their parents. College life gave the women the courage to challenge their parents and request autonomy over their own affairs. Some women succeeded, some did not. Jason's sister was one of those who achieved success. Jason told me the story of how his sister fought against his parents:

> I realized that after she was 18 or 19, she started going to college, and there was one time she came home, and there was a big fight [between my parents and my sister]. [My sister yelled] "You are not gonna get shit." "I am taking off." "I don't want to be here." "I am tired of this crap." just like instant.

## CONSTRUCTING SELF IDENTITY

### *In-Between—"ABC[4]"*

On the one hand, second-generation Chinese American youth considered their own dating patterns different from those of the mainstream American youth; on the other

[4] Short for America-Born Chinese.

hand, they distanced themselves from the values held by their parents. They appeared to be critical toward both American mainstream dating patterns and Chinese family values. In other words, the second generation Chinese American youth created two sets of boundaries—boundaries between "themselves" and mainstream American youth, and boundaries between "themselves" and their Chinese immigrant parents. What does being a "Chinese American" mean for them? Jason offered me other people's definition of his identity:

> So let me tell you this way. I go to a new conference, no one knows me. I am an ABC, right? But the way the Americans people are gonna treat is that I am a Chinese. They don't treat me just like a white guy. But if I walk around Chinatown, people treat me just like just a regular Chinese guy, unless I start opening my mouth and talk to them. They would think I am so Americanized.

Being an ABC, Jason noticed that he was labeled differently in different social contexts. Mainstream treated him as a Chinese because of his Asian physical appearance; people in Chinatown treated him as an American because of his ability to speak English well, which indicated that he was brought up in this country. Being "differentiated" by both mainstream and Chinese community, how do second-generation Chinese American youth seek recognition of themselves? Josh took a position in-between the two cultures. Josh's explained:

> In terms of stereotypes of Asian and American guys, whites are more aggressive than Asian guys. I have been here for my whole life. I am not as softly spoken as other Asian guys, but I am still not quite aggressive as the others. I am not gonna overly aggressive or overly softly. I think my friends are all generally mostly born here. So they are kind of softly spoken. We all know the culture is like.

Josh clearly pointed out his in-between position within American and Chinese cultures. Furthermore, according to Josh, his idea of "we" as strictly limited to people

who were born in the United States and aware of the "in-between" situation of being a "Chinese American."

***I am Very Chinese***

However, the three respondents who were not born in the United States, gave me a straightforward answer that they defined themselves as Chinese and "did not consider themselves as ABC." Hakuna, who immigrated to the United States at 10 years old, said, although his parents were very conservative, they were still "the only two people in the world for him to look up to." He said, "We speak Cantonese at home. I am very Chinese." Tao, who came here at 11 years old, expressed his understanding of the identities among Chinese American youths. He stated: "some people came here and just decided to be American. And I decided not to. So I mean pretty much have totally different views. It is possible." In his opinion, since identity was more of an individual choice, there would be a great deal of variation among the second-generation Chinese American youths' identities. Elaine, who came to the United States at 9 years old, spoke with proud conviction that she did not apply to be a U.S. citizen because she was still "patriotic" about "her country"—China.

Elaine explained that her family backgrounds played a crucial role in shaping her identity as a Chinese person. I was also told that her father traveled to China frequently and she knew "everything that is going on in China." She felt China was such a powerful country that she would go to work in China. She expressed her plan to work in China after her graduation from college.

### *Americanized Me*

Meanwhile, most of the rest respondents explicitly told me they were "Americanized" in this society. As Jenny said, "no matter how much we tried to keep our Chinese tradition, but we are still Americans." In her opinion, because of the diversity in the United States, it was inevitable that they would be Americanized.

Jason hung out with both ABCs and some Chinese students who came to the United States for college or graduate education. He observed large differences between his ABC friends and China-born friends because he was Americanized. Although some of his friends tried to dress more "Americanized" or get rid of their Chinese accent in their English, Jason still considered them differently because "the whole way they think is kind of different." As he explained:

> I think you consider an ABC, it does matter that you were born here or not…the age doesn't really matter. I think it matters on the way you think, the way you response to different situations, which is most different from different countries and people from here. So I don't think it looks, where you from, it is about the way you think. That is one thing that you can't really change. I meet a lot of people, they look ABC, they have a different…they are not ABC because of the accent or not…the whole way they think is kind different, because after all they are not Americans.

ABC or "Chinese American" was the identity which most of the respondents felt comfortable with. It provides a great chance for them to recognize both their Chinese background and American experience. However, it was not the only choice they had. I will discuss more of their identities they presented to me.

### *Pan-Asian American Consciousness*

The second-generation Chinese American youth generally shared a powerful sense of racial commonality with "other Asians." For them, the sense of shared race arose not simply from the understanding that Asians were "physically similar," at least in

the eyes of the dominant society; it also reflected the understanding of a shared "in-between" position between American mainstream culture and their immigrant parents' values. In their opinion, Asians, especially East Asians, had the same traditions, and thus all Asian immigrant parents shared similar characteristics such as close-mindedness, strictness, and so on. Also, because they were all brought up in the United States, they believed that they shared experiences of "being second generation immigrants." Jenny said the reason she liked her Korean boyfriend so much was because they had much of a cultural understanding of one another.

> I think for Asians, my boyfriend and I are the same. We know we can't get married or think about that until we get done with school. You know, we can't [do other things]. Like everything, a lot of things are very family-oriented. If he needs to go home and eat with family, I know, coz I have to go home and eat with my family too. It is stuff like that.

As Josh said, "We all know the culture is like. We have all been in this country for our life. We are kind of the same." Examinations of their attitudes toward interracial dating provided me a distinct perspective to explore second-generation Chinese American youths' pan-Asian consciousness. It appeared that there was an interesting "preference hierarchy" (Spickard 1989) among the respondents' attitudes towards interracial dating. Asian Americans, especially East Asians, not necessary Chinese, were listed on the top of this hierarchy. Eleven respondents reported that they had dated people with other Asian origins. Since Korean was the largest Asian group in Atlanta, eight out of the twenty respondents said they dated Korean, specifically second-generation Korean Americans. The demographic structure of the Asian population and a shared cultural identity produced a mutual preference between Chinese and Korean American youth. According

to the respondents, a common experience as second-generation Asian Americans gave them more common languages and further stimulated attractions among them.

Some male respondents also talked about how the negative stereotypes of Asians affected their dating experiences. Chris did research in one of his classes on stereotypes of Asian men and women in Hollywood. He remarked:

> Asian women in Hollywood, they are more like sex symbol. There are a lot of Asian women. The women are very sexy in those movies like Bruce Lee's movies and *Clouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*. Asian men are not that way. A lot of guys are pretty weak. The guys, even Bruce Lee, can't get a girl. So Asian women get the stereotype of submissive and Asian men are always very weak…that is really bad.

Awareness of those negative stereotypes generated a sense of hatred toward interracial dating between Asian women and white men among some of the male respondents. Such a sense of hatred reinforced the boundaries the male respondents set between whites and themselves. On the other hand, it further strengthened a sense of "we" among Asian men.

Such a widespread sense of a shared Asian American identity was also reflected among the respondents' friends. All of the respondents reported that their close friends were all Asian, while white friends were mostly "acquaintances." Compared to the respondents who were born in this country, the respondents, who immigrated to this country around 10 years old, reported that they did not have any white friends while they were in high school. When I asked Tina about her understanding of dating among her American friends, she said she could not give me an answer because she did not have any white friends. As she said, "I was isolated here when I was in high school. Most of my white friends were made in college. We are friends, but we are not very close." For those respondents who were born in the United States or immigrated here at an earlier age, they

tend to have a mixed group of friends with both whites and Asians. Chang reported that he was different from some Chinese people, who excluded Americans from their social group, because he hung out with both American and Asian friends. However, he further pointed out, "I am closer to my Asian friends. I treat them closer. And I keep certain distance from my Caucasian friends." For him, white friends were just for casually hanging out and having fun, while Asian friends were more for deeper communication.

The respondents' closeness toward their Asian American friends was also reflected in the way they excluded China-born immigrants who came to the United States after adolescence from their group of friends. Bebe criticized the girls from Hong Kong as being too immature because they gossiped a lot; while her Vietnamese friends were more mature because they were born in the United States and "Americanized." In her opinion, although she had a shared Chinese background with the Hong Kong girls, she shared more commonalities with second-generation Vietnamese friends because of their experience of being more "Americanized." Eventually, most of the respondents formed a small group identity, which was rigidly limited to second-generation Asian Americans.

***Geographic Location and Turning Points***

There were three respondents from areas where there is a large Asian population. Jenny, who were brought up in Southern California told me that she did not have the feeling of being a minority. However, after she moved to Atlanta, she started feeling a little insecure as an Asian because of the small Asian population here. In California she felt more secure and comfortable to be somewhere in-between Chinese and American rather than just simply being a Chinese or being an American. There were a large group of second-generation Asian Americans among her generations:

> I think I am somewhere in-between Chinese and American. I think I would be different if I lived somewhere else. I kind of feel different as an Asian American in Georgia even when I was in New York. California is like Asian people's little bubble. I wouldn't it exactly like Asia, but I wouldn't say, that it is not an area where you feel like that you are a minority. And to grow up in that area, you don't feel insecurity of being a minority. And so that is why I say I am somewhere in-between, because I am comfortable being somewhere in-between, and if I was born or lived in somewhere else, I would be more comfortable I was one or the other.

Since this study was conducted in Atlanta and most of the respondents were from other southern states in the United States. Seven of the respondents were from Georgia. The rest were from Tennessee, Florida, and Mississippi, where there is a much smaller Asian population. Some of the respondents complained that they were always the only one, or one of the few Asian students in their classes. According to Jenny, she, like other Asian respondents, felt more insecure as a minority and they might feel more uncomfortable to be in-between the two cultures.

Jason was brought up in a small town in Florida. As he said, from elementary to middle school, the majority of his friends were Americans. His best friends were all white Americans. But after he entered college, they were all Asians. Before he entered college, he did have a few Asian friends, however, he did not feel close to them at all. In fact, he never considered dating any Asian girls. Jason explained that college was the time for him to find himself, in other words, his identity. Different from the standard lifestyle in small town, college life presented a diverse world to Jason. He implied, in the small town, he was standardized as a "white." People he hung out with largely shaped his identity as a "normal" kid like his white peers. The things he cared about were school work and playing with his white peers.

> Your life is kind of very standard every day [in a small town]. You do the same thing everyday. Your identity is kind been white like the people you

> hang out with. But when you go to the college, everyone else is different. You may have one guy from the same high school. But everyone is different from you. You don't have any friends. It is time for you to find yourself.

College became a turning point in Jason's life when he started thinking about his own identity. "All of my friends were Asian." College provided an opportunity for Jason to know more ABC people who shared similar life experiences with him. He started to realize that in his childhood, even though he had close relations with white friends, he was not one of them. "You guys are real Americans. I am not American." The differences in family childrearing styles between his family and his white peers' family reminded him as "a different one" from Americans. In college, he realized that ABC, instead of white friends, shared more commonalities with him.

For the respondents who grew up in cities like Atlanta, with a relatively larger size Asian population, turning point in finding their self-identity started during high school. Being the biggest city in Southeast, Atlanta has a comparatively larger Asian population than other southern states. In some areas like Alpharetta and Duluth, the Korean and Chinese population is growing rapidly. Qing, who was born in the United States, was brought up in Alpharetta. With the growth of the Asian population in Atlanta, all of her friends became Asian, specifically Korean and Chinese, after she entered high school. They hung out together and became more and more exclusive toward other racial groups. She described:

> Asian people have little cliques. The whole bunch of Asian people even went to the same college. You know on campus, those little Asian groups, hang out, smoke outside…and I don't really meet this many American people here. I only met a couple; I wouldn't stay in touch or something. I won't call them friends. I will call them acquaintances. And the American people I met are not in school; I met when I go out, or when I was with other friends.

Such a form of exclusive Asian friendship reinforced Qing's identity as an Asian, or more so, a second-generation Asian American. As a matter of fact, those respondents who came to the United States at a relatively older age practiced small group identities more often. Lian, who emigrated from Shanghai at age 8, still had a fixed group of friends who were from Shanghai. During the interview, she would unconsciously remind me her background as a "Shanghainese." Chopin, who came to the United States at 11, only hung out with Cantonese and Taiwanese friends. She said, she would only date Taiwanese because she shared more commonalities with them. She differentiated Taiwanese and Cantonese from Mainland Chinese. By explaining how open she was with her mother about dating, she compared her experience with people from Mainland China:

> I guess because we are Cantonese. Cantonese tend to be more open about dating. Most Cantonese are more open with that…the same as Taiwanese. My Taiwanese friends don't hide the relationship at all. They are usually very casual. I guess in Mainland China, they have hierarchy. There is usually a gap between the parents and children. So usually the children don't talk about it.

As shown above, second-generation Chinese American youth constructed their self-identity through differentiating both American and Chinese dating cultures. There were noticeable variations among their self-identities. Through communication with their Asian peers, they also demonstrated a "pan-Asian" consciousness. Furthermore, their processes of constructing racial identities were also largely impacted by the social context and the geographic location where they were situated. Throughout their lifetime, their identities were also redefined and reconstructed based on the changes of social locations.

# CHAPTER SEVEN

# DISCUSSIONS

## USE DOUBLE LENSES TO PUSH AND PULL

Second-generation Chinese American youths' dating attitudes and behaviors, as shown in the earlier chapters, appeared to be a "melting pot" or an integration of dating values and gender norms of both Chinese American immigrant families and mainstream American society. Second-generation Chinese American youths were shown to construct their dating attitudes and behaviors on daily basis. In the process, they defined and redefined their ethnic identities through both cultural lenses. By probing for the details of the youths' interaction with their immigrant parents and mainstream American society, this study provided a contextualized understanding of the relationship between private life and larger social structure among second-generation Chinese American youths. Furthermore, findings of this study revealed a new dimension of the social construction of ethnic identity: the agentic dynamics of constructing the second-generation Chinese American identity.

### *Parents Assert the Superiority of Chinese Values*

In Chapter Five, findings revealed that Confucianism and patriarchy had been preserved and practiced by Chinese parents over second-generation Chinese youths' lives. This finding echoes previous studies about intergenerational relations within Asian American immigrant families (Kibria 1993a; Kibria 1997; Pyke and Johnson 2003; Lessinger 1995; Espiritu 2001). I specifically focused on the impact of Confucian values and norms on the second-generation youths' dating attitudes and behaviors in various respects.

The values of filial piety legitimatized the parents' interference in second-generation youths' dating. In comparison with males, female youths received remarkably more parental supervision from their parents with regard to dating and other aspects of private life. In addition, Chinese parents' constant emphasis on education as the only way for upward mobility discouraged dating. As perceived by the respondents, dating was viewed negatively and placed in lower priority compared to education in Chinese immigrant families. Unconsciously, such a focus on education over dating reinforced the stereotype of "model minority," which was generated by mainstream American society. Furthermore, under the direction of Confucianism, individuals should put family interests over individual preference. In this study, as the second-generation Chinese American respondents expressed, dating was seriously considered by Chinese parents as a family thing, which should lead to marriage and producing generations for the family. It was shown that some Chinese parents considered marriage as a substitution for "happiness."

Only a few participants reported that premarital sex was spoken of explicitly in Chinese families. However, by using various implications and jokes, the parents generally transmitted a set of gendered values toward sexuality. Male respondents tended to receive a high level of trust from their parents while females were constantly watched by their parents to guard their virginity. Lessinger (1995) argues that among the Indian American community, the continued preoccupation with female chastity and morality as related to sexuality not only attempts to keep women subordinated but more importantly is an effort to maintain a cultural distinction between Indians and "the Americans." Similarly, according to the respondents, Chinese parents did the same thing to draw boundaries between the Chinese and "the Americans" by controlling their daughters'

dating and premarital sex. Most of the previous studies tend to focus more on parental control over females' sexuality (Espiritu 2001). My study provided a comparative perspective to examine parents' attitudes toward both sons' and daughters' sexuality, and thus presented a larger picture of gender inequalities among Chinese American families.

In terms of interracial dating, Chinese parents presented a general preference toward Chinese, or East Asians. Females faced much more pressure than males to satisfy their parents' preference toward dating Chinese. An interesting finding of this study was that Chinese parents also considered whites with decent socioeconomic status as favorable dating candidates for their children. On the other hand, the respondents never mentioned dating with African Americans or Hispanic Americans during the interviews. Most of them said that their parents assumed that interracial dating only referred to white-Asian interracial dating. Previous studies (Fong 1998; Fujino 1997) also demonstrate that Chinese-white marriage composes more than half of out-marriages among Chinese Americans, the other half includes marriages between Chinese and other Asian groups and racial minorities. Earlier studies (Shinagawa and Pang 1995) find that well-educated Asian Americans tend to "maximize their status" by marrying the "most advantaged individuals with the highest racial position." Specifically, for Asian American women, those individuals are generally refers to white males with the same or higher economic status and higher racial status. In this study, Chinese parents' preference toward whites with higher socioeconomic status seemed to be consistent with Shinagawa and Pang's (1995) explanation of the high rate of white-Asian interracial dating.

It is widely noted that white middle-class values are defined as mainstream American culture, which is used to differentiate racial minorities in the United States. However, in

China 92% of the population is from one ethnicity. Minority groups generally live in separate geographic locations, with little interaction between minorities and the majority. Racial issues are rarely recognized as a social factor that affects people's upward mobility (Tong 2003). When Chinese parents moved to the United States, they appear to have a clear understanding of their social status as a racial minority and how this new racial identity could affect their social mobility. How do they respond to the difference between their racial and ethnic status in China and in the United States?

Previous studies (Espirtitu 2001) argue that in response to the status of being a racial minority in the United States, Asian immigrants tended to assert the superiority of their ethnic cultures and to locate themselves above the mainstream American culture. This study showed that the immigrant parents made every effort to preserve Chinese culture, especially values of Confucianism. By exerting control over their children's dating and courtship, they attempted to transmit traditional Confucian values to their children who were brought up within the larger social context of American mainstream culture.

The majority of the immigrant Chinese parents immigrated to the United States between the 1960s and the 1980s (Tong 2003). During that historical period of time, dating had just emerged in Chinese society and was still regulated under traditional Chinese family values (Honig and Hershatter 1998). Dating was considered family oriented and was strictly supervised by parental authorities under Confucian principles. It is likely that first-generation immigrants attempted to rigidly construct and enforce an image of Chinese culture or values, which were in fact specific to the context they were familiar with before they left China. This result is similar to what Das Gupta (1997) refers as "museumization" practices—Indian American immigrant parents make every

effort to preserve the tradition of arranged marriage, which has been weakened in the Indian society since they left India. Although contemporary Chinese society has been more and more westernized in terms of dating practices, immigrant Chinese parents' understanding of Chinese dating values has been fixed within the Chinese context of the 1960s to the 1980s.

Similar to previous studies (Espiritus 2003; Pyke and Johnson 2003), this study revealed that women's morality was used as an essential strategy for the Chinese community to claim an image of moral superiority to the dominant group. Women faced much more restriction on their autonomy and personal decision-making than men. Daughters had curfews while sons could come back home as late as they desired. Specifically, a daughter's virginity was greatly related to the family's reputation in terms of morality. Although sons had certain restrictions over their sexuality, premarital sex was more accepted by their families. Daughters were constantly warned by their parents to guard their virginity and protect themselves from premarital sex. Patriarchy was reinforced through protecting female's sexuality and autonomy with regard to dating. These findings echo previous studies among Indian American families (Das Gupta 1997; Das Gupta 1998), Filipina American families (Espiritu 2001), Korean American families (kibria 1993b; Kibiria 1997), and other Asian American families. Gender, specifically women's sexuality, has continued to be used to keep women subordinated. Women's morality related to sexuality continued to be utilized as a strategy for the Chinese community to maintain their ethnic identity American society.

Because of their racial and cultural differences, Chinese Americans are historically stereotyped as "foreigners" or the unassimilated. Although they are

segregated from mainstream American society, Chinese Americans have been constantly touted by media as a "model minority," who are viewed as successful, hardworking, and well-educated. The success of Chinese Americans has been depicted to be closely connected to the "Chinese family values," which refer to cohesive family relations, filial piety, Confucian values, etc. Fong (1998) argues that the model minority image minimizes the negative impact of discrimination and inequality confronted by Asian Americans, places undue pressure and anguishes on young Asian Americans, and creates tremendous resentment against Asian Americans. Even though they are touted as "model," they are still treated as "minorities." They continue to be treated as foreigners in all sectors of American society. Meanwhile, the media continues to present negative images of Asian American men and women. Asian men are depicted as weak, nerdy, and sexually impotent. Asian women are characterized as submissive and sexually receptive (Fong 1998).

In response to racialized stereotypes, Chinese American families continued to keep a strong extended family network, practicing filial piety, emphasizing education, and guarding female sexuality. The way the immigrant parents preserved traditional Chinese culture is demonstrated by their children's private life of dating and sexuality in response to the larger mainstream American society. Further, the second-generation Chinese American youths' construction of self-identity was largely connected to how they responded to their parents' restriction and control over their private life.

***Intergenerational Negotiation:***

***Constructing Chinese Dating Culture through an Americanized Lens***

In this study, one of the most important findings was that second-generation Chinese American youth generally held a negative attitude toward Chinese tradition. It is intriguing to find that they criticized their parents' dating values such as matchmaking, excessive emphasis on dating partner's educational and family background, and marriage oriented dating. Through an Americanized lens, the second-generation Chinese American youths demonstrated a strong sense of cultural resistance toward traditional Chinese dating values. In their mind, the strict and practical Chinese childrearing style was constructed in opposition to the mainstream American childrearing style, which emphasized egalitarian, openness, and autonomy. The respondents perceived American parents as friends and supporters rather than authority when it came to dating issues. When discussing their relations with parents, the respondents used the white parents as the standard ideal parents. Therefore, this led them to view their immigrant parents as conservative and old-fashioned. The idealization of white parents' image as open minded and equal on the issue of dating made the second-generation respondents want to distance themselves from the identity of being Chinese, which, they feel, is imposed by their parents.

Such a perceived gap between their expectations of ideal parenthood and Chinese parenthood constantly caused and enhanced intergenerational tensions within Chinese American families. However, different individuals chose different ways to respond to the tensions and the strict parental control. As presented in Chapter Six, "girls take parents seriously, guys just do whatever." This finding was consistent with one of Pyke's studies

of second-generation Korean and Vietnamese children. Pyke (2000) discovers that the majority of her respondents value and plan to maintain their ethnic tradition of filial piety. Especially among the daughters, a desire of taking care of their parents is displayed even though they maintain a conflicting relationship with their parents. Similarly, in this study, female respondents tended to follow parents' guidelines and respect their authority over their dating issue; male respondents, on the other hand, would treat parents' opinion as less important and expand their autonomy over personal issue.

In this study, male respondents considered themselves as more "Americanized" in the way that they treated their parents as friends rather than authority, whereas female respondents experienced numerous stresses because they considered parents' opinions to be authority and used them to guide their behaviors. The different levels of acceptance and rejection of parental control, as reported by second-generation respondents, demonstrated a gendered pattern of child-rearing in Chinese families. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, among Asian American communities, immigrant parents tended to use women's morality as a main strategy to claim cultural superiority in the host country. Accordingly, women were more likely than men to internalize parental control and use these control to guide their dating behaviors. As an important part of Chinese traditions, filial piety was more likely to be fulfilled by women than men. It seemed that women perpetuated the identity of being Chinese more deeply than men, to a certain degree.

However, I did notice that even though Chinese American women were more likely to be expected to marry inside of the Chinese ethnic group, female respondents tended to date outside of Chinese group more often than males. This finding echoes several previous studies about the higher rate of out-marriage of Asian women than Asian

men. Fong and Yung (1995) point out that there are complex and multilayered factors involved in interracial marriage among Asian Americans, especially Asian American women. They argue that Asian women married interracially because they want to avoid traditional Asian patriarchy, and are seeking more egalitarian relationships. Some Asian American women marry whites for some measures of upward mobility and social status. Meanwhile, due to the negative images of Asian men, some Asian women also consider white males more attractive and sexy than Asian men. In this study, all of the above three explanations are reflected. There were respondents who dated interracially to rebel against parental control and pursue gender equality in a relationship. There were also respondents considering higher socioeconomic status as the most important criteria for a date. Most of the male respondents realized the negative stereotypes imposed on them by the media and how those images affected their dating opportunities both inside and outside the Chinese community.

***Constructing American Dating Values as the Other through a Chinese Lens***

It was noted that the second-generation Chinese American youth differentiated their dating values from traditional Chinese values imposed by their immigrant parents. How did they perceive mainstream American dating culture? As I presented in Chapter Six, the second-generation respondents perceived American culture and Chinese culture as two oppositional cultures. What Chinese do is what Americans do not do. Consequently, they believed that their dating values had to be different from their American peers because of their Chinese upbringing. Generally, compared to their own dating attitudes, the second-generation respondents perceived that mainstream white dating was more casual, sexually oriented, and less committed. The process of differentiating themselves from American

peers was actually the process through which they internalized the values and beliefs they inherited from their Chinese extended family.

It is important to notice that differentiating themselves from this pattern of American dating and premarital sex did not necessarily mean that the second-generation Chinese American youths held a negative attitude toward American dating. Findings revealed that both cultural resistance and acculturation existed among the second-generation respondents with regard to their attitudes toward mainstream American dating.

Some respondents considered the American patterns of dating superior to those practiced by Chinese. As a result, they tended to acculturate to American patterns. There were also some respondents who considered patterns of American dating as "immature" and "not acceptable." This group of people tended to treat American dating as morally flawed and distanced themselves from it. It is interesting that there were another group of respondents who held their comments back and simply described American dating from an outsider's perspective. They seemed to present an ambiguous attitude towards American dating culture. They did not pick a clear standpoint to simply criticize or confirm American dating and sexual culture. Such a phenomenon might be explained as the result of the confusion and instability of their positions between Chinese and American dating cultures. This complexity deserves more exploration in future studies.

I could not draw a simple conclusion that all second-generation youths consider American dating as "good" or "bad." There are remarkable variations among the second-generation Chinese American youths' attitudes toward mainstream American culture. Accordingly, through a subtle process of resisting or adapting to mainstream American dating patterns, different individuals choose their own positions according to their own

level of comfort. This finding is consistent with the social constructionist model of ethnicity, which suggests that ethnic identity is situated and fluid. In the context of dating, each individual selected his or her own particular pattern of dating attitudes, which might both differentiate and/or integrate American dating culture and Chinese dating cultures. This process of negotiation and adaptation is similar to the social constructionist argument about racial identity (Nagel 1994). It is stated that racial ethnic minorities construct and reconstruct their ethnic culture in their everyday life. They may pick and choose cultural elements from both the host and ethnic cultures to meet their own needs. The second-generation Chinese American youths' dating behaviors and attitudes seem to reject the one dimensional uniformity of linear progression as proposed by assimilation theorists. Although many seem to be critical of Chinese parents' conservative attitudes, most respondents do not accept American dating attitudes and behaviors uncritically. They are picking and choosing their own dating culture.

**DOING GENDER ACROSS CULTURES**

In Chapter Six, remarkable differences were identified in gender norms and expectations for dating behaviors and attitudes. Findings also revealed variations within the same gender with regard to the extent of acceptance and rejection of gendered dating norms. Respondents demonstrated both noticeable positive and negative attitudes toward American gender norms. Again, mainstream American gender norms were constructed as completely oppositional to Chinese traditional gender roles. American women were depicted as more brave, confident, and independent than Chinese women. American men were considered by some respondents to be more aggressive and fair than Chinese young men. There were also respondents who considered American women as

sexually “promiscuous” and American men as “cheaper” and less caring. Overall, the second-generation respondents displayed different levels of acceptance and rejection toward American gender norms. Such a result is one of the main contributions of this study—by delving into the details of dating behaviors of second generation Chinese American youths, such as paying bills and initiating the first date, this study reveals deeper sociological meanings of dating behaviors within the context of gender and racial identity.

***Resistance to American Gender Roles***

Previous studies point out that gender is a key to immigrant identity and is a vehicle for racialized immigrants to declare cultural superiority over the dominant group (Das Gupta 1997 and 1998; Espiritu 2001; Kibria1993b; Kibria1997). Historically, Chinese American men have been excluded from mainstream cultural notions of masculinity. A series of stereotypes, which stigmatize Chinese American men as weak, asexual, passive, and malleable, have been disseminated and perpetuated through Hollywood movies and other mass media. On the other hand, Chinese American women have been portrayed as submissive and sexual as a possession of white men. Those dominant stereotypes racialize Chinese masculinity and femininity and in turn have affected Chinese American youths’ dating attitudes and behaviors. Findings revealed that the second-generation Chinese American youths exhibited cultural resistance toward American gender norms; in the process, they fought against racialized stereotypes.

By asserting cultural superiority of Chinese traditional gender roles, the second-generation Chinese American respondents challenged white cultural racism against Asian men and women. For instance, by denying American ways of splitting dating cost, most

of Chinese male youths in the study paid the bills for their dating partners to fulfill the traditional masculine role of being a good "breadwinner" and protector. Initiating the first date and paying bills for their dating partners maintained the Chinese male youths' "egos as men" and thus denied the racialized stereotype of weak Chinese men in mainstream American society.

For the female respondents, by portraying American girls as sexually promiscuous and morally flawed, they claimed the superiority of Chinese morality in sexuality and rejected the stereotype of Asian women as sexual symbol. This finding is similar to Espiritu's (2001) study of Filipina American women's perception of "promiscuous American girls."

In addition, a high-level of emotional attachment and commitment differentiated them from those "casual" American girls. The female respondents' emphasis on emotions and attachment also reflected the gender norms of traditional Chinese women, specifically the role their mothers played at home. As shown in Chapter 4, mothers are the ones who conducted all the emotional talk and house chores at home. Female respondents might internalize their mothers' emotional work as a feminine characteristic and thus they may further integrate them into their dating behaviors and attitudes.

Espiritu (1996) argues that in the Asian American community, women are empowered after the 1960s because of their increasing ability to provide economic resources for the family. She contends that both resistance and persistence of male privilege exists in Asian American community. Similar to Espiritu's finding, this study reveals the expectation of greater gender equality among the female respondents in both their dating relationships and family environments.

### *Resistance to Chinese Gender Roles*

Throughout the earlier chapters of this thesis, findings clearly identified a pattern of resistance toward Chinese traditional gender roles and an appreciation of perceived American egalitarian gender norms. As discussed above, although the second-generation respondents followed traditional gender roles in practice, they also expected certain changes, which could be adopted from American gender norms. For instance, women were expected by men to be initiators and to be as brave as American women. Men were expected by females to be more respectful to women in terms of paying bills on a date. The way of sharing financial responsibility of dating, for example, is adopted by several respondents. Especially, among the female respondents, a strong desire to be independent on a date was widely accepted. Paying for their own bills provides an opportunity for young women to strive for autonomy, which has been suppressed by their immigrant parents at home.

According to previous studies (Espiritu 1996; Fong 1998), Chinese American women's growing educational and economic opportunities challenge Confucian codes toward gender inequality. This study showed that the empowerment of Chinese women was also reflected in the realm of private life. Chinese American women strived for more gender equality in their dating relationships, which they could not achieve in their immigrant homes. The desire to be as brave, confident, and more initiative as much as American girls reflected their resistance to the traditional expectation of women to be submissive. Seeking egalitarian relationship outside of Chinese community could be another explanation for Chinese American women's higher ratio of interracial dating than Chinese men.

### *Pick and Choose: Constructing Their Own Gender Norms*

As shown above, both acceptance and rejection were evident in respondents' attitudes toward Chinese and mainstream American gender norms in this study. Some of their gender expectations might be particularly "Chinese," while others were similar to their white peers. The second-generation respondents' understanding of gender roles can be viewed as a shifting space between the traditional Chinese patriarchy and the more equalitarian American gender norms. For example, the female respondents held open attitudes toward premarital sex, which was not allowed by Chinese immigrant parents. The female respondents considered it as part of their "Americanization." However, although they emphasized the purpose of dating for marriage less than their parents, the female respondents considered true love and high levels of emotional attachment or commitment as an important prerequisite, which could be included as part of their "Chineseness." Second-generation female youths constructed their moral values on premarital sex by both differentiating and integrating their perceptions of Chinese and American norms.

Generally speaking, men demonstrated a higher level of acculturation to mainstream American dating values than women in this study. For instance, the male respondents tended to be more casual toward dating and premarital sex than the female respondents. As discussed in Chapter Five, Chinese young men had much more autonomy over their private life from their Chinese parents. Their sexuality and dating were not necessarily related to marriage and family as strongly as those of Chinese women. Therefore, they had more freedom to choose to assimilate to their white peers or not.

It is important to note that there is no simple conclusion that all second-generation Chinese American youth adapt to mainstream American gender norms. The second-generation Chinese American youths neither completely accept Chinese traditional gender norms nor fully adapt to American "egalitarian" gender relations. The real situation is that through various processes of picking and choosing between both Chinese and American gender norms, different individuals, both men and women, construct their own gender standards.

The findings of this study reflect a doing gender framework, which suggests that the second-generation Chinese American youths are able to "perform" or "do" gender within the contexts of both Chinese and mainstream gender norms (Coltrane 1989; West and Zimmerman 1987). They "do" gender through a process of picking and choosing from their perceptions of both cultures based on their own level of comfort (Coltrane 1989; West and Zimmerman 1987). Findings also revealed that for the second-generation respondents, gender was not a "natural" state of being. Rather, gender was situational and fluid. Their perceptions and performances of gender shifted constantly through negotiation between Chinese and mainstream American gender norms.

**ETHNIC OPTIONS: BETWEEN CHINESE AND AMERICAN CULTURES**

Because of their skin color and physical appearance, Chinese Americans are historically stereotyped as "foreigners" or the unassimilated and excluded from the white mainstream (Espiritu 2001). Other stigmatized images as "model minorities" are also applied to define Chinese Americans as "the other." Meanwhile, second-generation Chinese American youths face huge amounts of pressure from their immigrant parents to preserve Chinese dating values and Chinese identity. In response to the pressures, they

hold strong cultural resistance to some Chinese traditional values, especially in terms of dating and sexuality. As a result, their options to identify themselves are constrained by both mainstream society and their Chinese upbringing. However, in this study I reveal that the second-generation youths made every effort to gain control over their identity and exert this control through constructing their own dating values. By differentiating themselves from both their immigrant parents and their American peers, the second-generation Chinese American youth attempted to expand the space between American and Chinese cultures and thus created more ethnic options for themselves.

Different from previous scholars that view the second-generation Chinese Americans as being torn between being Chinese and being American, being whitewashed or "FOB" (Fresh off the Boat) (Tong 2003; Pyke and Dang 2003), this study reveals that the second-generation Chinese Americans were able to expand the space between these two identities and find a comfortable position for themselves. Applying a social constructionist approach to the process of ethnic identity construction, I would argue that Chinese youths' racial ethnic identity is dynamic, situational, and fluid. They pick and choose their Chinese or American identities in different situations and according to different emotional and contextual needs.

***Being an ABC—Bicultural Identity***

In this study, the respondents most commonly identified themselves as bicultural middle—a part of them is Chinese and the other part is American. "Chinese American" provided an option for the second-generation Americans to claim a bicultural identity. They believed that they belonged to both Chinese and American communities. Being a Chinese American offered a legitimate explanation for why they viewed Chinese culture

through an Americanized lens and at the same time examined American culture through a Chinese perspective. Defining self as a Chinese American was an effective strategy for the second-generation respondents to cope with the conflicts with their parents' demands of preserving Chinese traditions and the mainstream American view of them as foreigners. Further, being an in-between Chinese American enabled them to identify with whites in mainstream settings while also reaffirming presumptions of their ethnic distinctiveness. Previous studies (Pyke and Dang 2003; Espiritu 2003) show that a bicultural identity is most commonly identified by the second-generation Asian Americans through discrediting coethnics who either stick to traditional ethnic culture and resist to assimilate ("FOB") or denial their ethnic backgrounds by making every effort to merge into white culture ("whitewashed"). This study confirms previous findings about the meaning of "being bicultural" and further expands these meanings into the context of dating and courtships.

Data revealed strong links between the respondents' dating values with their bicultural identity, which occupied a shifting terrain between being an "authentic" Chinese like their parents and an "authentic" American like their peers. The second-generation Chinese American youths constructed their own values of dating and gender roles by constantly interacting with their Chinese parents and their white peers. This was a process of constantly negotiating and reconstructing rather than simply accepting or rejecting one or the other. Being a bicultural middle and identify as in-between also allow them to shift between "Chinese-ness" and "American-ness" based on the issues they are dealing with and the context they are situated. Over the issues of premarital sex, they were able to use their "Americanized" background to legitimize their flexible attitude in

sexuality and thus differentiate themselves from their strict parents. On the other hand, they could also claim their "Chinese-ness" because they required the involvement of high-level commitment for premarital sex.

***Choose to be a Chinese***

Whether the respondents were born in the United States affects the ethnic options they choose. As demonstrated in Chapter 6, respondents who came to the United States at late childhood (still before 12 years old) tended to define themselves as Chinese. Those foreign-born respondents demonstrated a stronger sense of ethnic pride compared to that of American-born ones. Even though some individuals held "Americanized" views of dating, commitment, and premarital sex, they decided not to be "American" by refusing to apply for citizenship or date people out of Asian groups.

Those who immigrated to this country at late childhood tended to be able to speak Chinese more fluently than those who were born here. Some of them kept connections with family members in China and watched Chinese media. They were immersed within the "Chinese" context more often and deeply than those who were born in this country. As a result, they would more likely to choose to define themselves as Chinese and intentionally ignored their "Americanized" selves.

Kibria (1993) suggests that age of immigration does have a significant effect on individuals' perception of both their ethnic and American cultures. Whether an individual was born in the United States has much to do with the attachment to their home country culture. Kibira (1993) also points out that among immigrants, adolescence (greater than 12 years old) is "the dividing line in terms of cultural affinity." However, most of the previous studies do not separate study subjects who were born in the United States and

those who came to the country at late childhood due to the reason of convenience sampling.

In this study, I differentiated the second-generation respondents and those immigrated to this country at their late childhood (still before 12 years old). I applied Kibiria's dividing line of 12 years old to conduct the comparison. As shown in previous chapters, I found that there were noticeable differences between the two groups in terms of how they constructed their perception of homeland culture, American culture, and their ethnic identities. However, because of the limitation of small sample, more studies with a larger comparative sample size will benefit future studies to draw conclusions on this issue.

***Pan-Asian Consciousness***

Findings demonstrated that developing a pan-Asian friendship circle and dating circle reinforced the second-generation respondents' identity as Asian Americans. Many respondents felt that Asian Americans shared the experience of "an Asian upbringing" and socialization into the Asian values of education, family, hard work and respect for elders. Meanwhile, this sense of a common Asian cultural background was also explicitly constructed in opposition to the dominant white U.S. culture. The notion of "boundaries" is often used by social constructionists to explain how people construct their ethnic identities both inside and outside of their communities (Negal 1994; Kibria 1997). In this study, the second-generation created the boundaries of "Asian-ness" by distinguishing it from that of a homogenized white "mainstream" U.S. culture.

This study also suggests that pan-Asian consciousness was developed among certain ethnicities of the Asian American population. Demographic characteristics and cultural

similarities led to the second-generation respondents' closeness or distance to certain ethnic groups within Asian population. Because this study was located in metro-Atlanta, where Korean and Chinese are the largest Asian groups, a mutual dating preference between Chinese and Korean American youths was clearly pronounced. In one of her studies about intermarriage and ethnic identity among second-generation Chinese and Korean Americans, Kibiria (1997) also reveals a strong sense of closeness between Chinese and Korean Americans.

The above findings further confirm the notion of how individuals draw their "boundaries" along the ethnic and racial lines. Because of their cultural affiliation and similarities with other Asian ethnic groups, the second-generation Chinese American youth create the boundary of "us" Asians from "them" Americans. In this study, dating provided a valuable vehicle to understanding the second-generation Chinese American youths' construction of "being an Asian" through examining their dating preferences and gender expectations.

***Turning Point—College***

Sidel (1994) suggests that college is culturally expected, especially for middle-class Americans, to be a time of self-exploration, of engagement and concern with issues of identity. During college years, young people live without their parents, meet different people, come upon new ideas, and experience different lifestyles. Thus college provides an opportunity for young people to explore and identify themselves and others within a social context which is totally different from the one in which they are brought up.

As shown in this study, some respondents who grew up in white-dominated regions, experienced a dramatic change in their understanding of self after they entered

college. The identity of being an "Asian American" or "Chinese American" started becoming more and more prominent in the respondents' lives. Meanwhile, a lot of Chinese immigrant parents loosened their control over them after the second-generation Chinese youths entered college because college was viewed as an important achievement for upward mobility. The second-generation youths received less control and supervision from their parents over their dating. It was also revealed in my study that college was the time the second-generation respondents, especially female respondents, started to rebel against parents' authority and strive for autonomy over personal life.

For people who grew up in areas with a small Asian population, college became the turning point to redefine their self-identities. However, for people who were brought up in the areas such as Los Angeles, New York, or big cities like Atlanta, the second-generation American youth started the process of finding themselves earlier. Nevertheless, college was the period of time when identity issues became more prominent because of looser parental control and more freedom and opportunities to know and date different people.

Since more and more Asian Americans attend colleges, the second-generation Chinese American youths are able to find people who have similar life experiences as them—born in the United States and brought up in Chinese families. Second-generation Chinese American youths developed their social circle with a sense of exclusiveness. White friends were more likely to be defined as "acquaintances" and foreign-born Chinese immigrants were considered "not Americanized" and excluded from their friendship circle. Similar to friendship, their dating preferences were mostly limited to people of similar backgrounds—Asian Americans.

### *Small Group Identity*

Social constructionists (Negal 1994) argue that the ethnic minorities draw the boundaries of their ethnic identities along the borders both externally with racial and ethnic outsiders, and internally with members inside of their own ethnic groups. Similarly, in this study, findings reveal that not only did the Chinese American respondents differentiate themselves from their American peers and their immigrant parents, they also created various small groups or sub-ethnic identities, such as "Taiwanese," "Shanghaiese," "Americanized me," and so on. This process is referred by Pyke and Dang (2003) as "intraethnic othering."

The shifting space created by the second-generation Chinese American youths not only included large group identity of "Asian-ness," but also included several small group identities such as "Shanghainese," "Taiwanese," or "Cantonese," as discussed in Chapter 6. The respondents who were not born in the United States more often identified those small identities due to their strong attachment to the area where they originated. The ability to speak Chinese or dialects of Chinese enabled them to strengthen such bonds. Those factors affected their dating preference and as well as their construction of identities.

# CHAPTER EIGHT

# CONCLUSION

## CONCLUSION

Most previous studies focus on Asian American marriages, especially interracial marriages. This study makes a unique contribution to the small body of literature on Chinese American dating. Rather than simply reiterating as descriptive data the account of dating attitudes and behaviors offered by respondents, I examined and explored the implications of gendered and racialized identities underneath their stories. In so doing, I uncovered a subtle process by which the second-generation Chinese youths constructed their dating values and identities through both differentiating and integrating their parents' and white peers' dating cultures and gender norms. By differentiating themselves from their Chinese immigrant parents, the second-generation Chinese American youths were able to integrate mainstream white American values. On the other hand, through internalizing Chinese cultures, Chinese American youths differentiated "us"—the Chinese from "them" –the Americans regarding dating attitudes, behaviors, and gender norms. Chinese American youths constructed and reconstructed their own dating values, gender norms, and ethnic identities through various processes of picking and choosing from both cultures. Hence, I would agree straight-line assimilation theories that assume adaptation into mainstream American culture do not explain the complexity of the dating culture created by the second-generation Chinese American youths.

Furthermore, in response to the constraints from both Chinese family and racism from American society, the second-generation Chinese American youth make every effort to expand the space for individual ethnic options through the process of constructing their own dating values. This conclusion challenges the result from earlier

studies that the second-generation Chinese Americans are torn between being Chinese and being American. In contrast, as data revealed, to some extent, ethnic identity becomes a personal choice. The second-generation Chinese American youths exert control over their identities, even though there are serious constraint from both their parents and mainstream American culture.

Furthermore, a multilayered structure of identity has been revealed among the second-generation Chinese American youths in this study. The second-generation Chinese American youths constructed their own racial ethnic identities through drawing the boundaries along the lines inside and outside of their ethnic community. In addition, they expanded their boundaries and further reconstructed their ethnic identity in response to the changes of external and internal factors, including changes of parental supervision, racism, changes of geographic location, entering college, their immigrant age, and so on. Individuals were able to choose and shift their identities based on the social locations and transitions they are situated. I would argue findings from this study support the theory of social construction theory of ethnic identity.

**IMPLICATION FOR PUBLIC POLICY**

Findings revealed a lack of communication between second-generation Chinese American youths and their immigrant parents in terms of sex education. Sex is rarely talked in Chinese American communities, not to mention education about safe sex or sexual transmitted disease (STD) preventions. Chinese parents seemed to avoid (intentionally or unintentionally) their responsibility of sex education for their children. As a result, the media and peers became the main sources for Chinese American youths to obtain sexual information. Findings also revealed that second-generation Chinese

American youths, especially women, tended to keep silent on sexual topics. Even though Chinese American youths may be less sexually active than their white peers, they needed to be informed about the danger of rape, sexual harassment, and the strategies to protect themselves. Therefore, it is important for public policy makers to respond to this specific situation. Different sex education strategies may be applied within Chinese American communities or the other Asian American communities.

In addition, it appeared that second-generation Chinese American youths were under huge pressure to achieve academic success because of high expectations from their parents and the stereotype of "model minority." Little attention has been given to understanding how Asian Americans internalize the high expectations from their parents and cope with the stereotype of "model minority." The serious psychological and emotional pressure that many Chinese American youths experienced have rarely been studied by researchers, or examined by the media and public policy makers. This area deserves more attention from researchers, educators, and public policy makers.

**FUTURE STUDIES**

Findings of this study raise more research questions for future studies in different areas of Asian American dating and family studies. First, it will be interesting to explore how immigrant parents construct their ethnic identities within American society. As noted in Chapter Two, racial and ethnic issues are not recognized as a social factor that influences individual's social positions in Chinese society. How do the parents respond to ethnic and cultural diversity in the United States? To some extent, do they acculturate to mainstream American culture? How do they view themselves by taking into account

their children's construction of ethnic identities? These questions can be examined by conducting in-depth interviews with Chinese immigrant parents.

Second, based on the results of this study, one cannot ascertain whether the third-generation or even later generations will have similar patterns of construction of culture and ethnic identity. The racialized images of Chinese Americans in the mainstream society are similar, whereas the family dynamic would be different because the third generation Chinese Americans' parents are second-generation immigrants. What kind of parental control are the third-generation Chinese Americans facing? How do they themselves perceive Chinese culture and define themselves? How does the second-generation Chinese American's construction of Chinese and American culture affect their parenting styles? These interesting questions deserve more attention in the future.

In addition, the examination of intergenerational negotiation of dating values between Chinese immigrant parents and the second-generation youths, especially the practice of filial piety in relation to dating within Chinese family, provides a unique opportunity for future studies in exploring the gendered pattern of elder care among Chinese American families. Do interracial and inter-ethnic marriages affect elder care? How is the culture of filial piety perceived and practiced by second-generation Chinese American immigrants? What is the role of gender in fulfilling filial responsibility among second-generation Chinese American immigrants? These are a few questions deserve future inquiry.

Finally, the importance of geographic location is also identified in this study with regard to the second-generation Chinese American youths' construction of their dating values and identities. Further studies will be benefited from conducting comparisons

between areas with a large Chinese population such as Los Angeles or New York and areas with a relatively small Chinese population such as Atlanta.

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**Appendix A**

**Cultural Assimilation or Negotiation:**
**A Study of Chinese American Youth's Dating Attitudes and Behaviors**

**Interview Questions:**

Subject #_____ Date_____

Pseudonym_____ Gender_____

Age_____

Are you a Student? Yes____ No_____;

If yes, what is your field of study_____; What year are you in?

____Freshmen, ___Sophomore, ___Junior, ___Senior, ____Graduate

If not, your occupation_____

Were you born in the U.S.? Yes___; No___

If not, When did you immigrate to the U.S.? Year_____, age at immigration_____.

Age of your parents' immigration_____; Year of their immigration_____.

Parents' highest educational attainment: father_____; Mother_____

Estimates of Parents joint income range_____

**Family Values of Dating**

1. What have your family said to you about dating and relationships?
2. Will you inform your parents when you date? When do you think is appropriate to information your parents?

3. Do you have brothers or sisters? Have your parents treated you and your siblings equally regarding dating? Are your brothers and sisters treated similarly?

4. Have you ever hidden a dating relationship from your parents or family? Why? Probe for details?

5. Have you ever had any conflict with your family over issues of dating or relationships? When and why?

6. Do you think your parents view your date partner as your marital partner?

7. What are your parents' views of premarital sex? Have they ever talked to you about this topic?

8. What is your parents' opinion in inter-racial dating and marriage?

**Images of American Dating**

9. What do your non-Chinese peers do when they date? Probing for their attitudes towards details in American dating culture: what do Americans do, where do Americans meet, whom do Americans date? Who pay the dating cost? Who ask for/initiate the first date?

10. Do you think Americans date with or without commitment? Do you think Americans date for marriage?

11. What are your opinions of the pre-marital sex in America? Probing for more details: Who initiate sex? When do you think Americans start to have sex?

12. Where do you get the messages of dating and sex, from your non-Chinese peers, school, or media?

13. Do you think your understanding of “a date” or dating is the same as your American friends? Do you share your ideas/opinion about dating with your Chinese friends? Probing for cultural differences in dating concept and practices.

**Definition of Dating**

14. What do you think it means to have a date? What does dating or to be dating someone mean to you?

Probing for dating details: what do you do, where do you meet, who do you date? Who pay the dating cost? Who ask for/initiate the first date?

15. When do you think it can be called a “date”?

16. Do you think your concept of dating is the same as the person you date with? Probing for gendered differences in dating concepts.

**Dating Attitudes**

17. Do you think finding a marital partner is one of the major purposes of date?

18. In your opinion, is recreation a major purpose for dating?

19. Do you think it is all right to date without commitment? (Do you think you have to date with commitment?)

20. Do you think it is okay to interracially date? Will you consider choosing a marital partner outside the Chinese ethnic group?

21. What are your views on premarital sex?

22. When do you think is the right time for people to have sex?

Probing for attitudinal differences in premarital sex at different dating stages (casual dating, going steady, engaged, or only after marriage)?

23. Do you think it is all right to have sex with your dating partner if you have no intent to marry him/her?
24. Do you think there is a gender difference in who should ask for sex? Do you think it is okay for girls ask sex from guys?
25. Do you think there is a gender difference in attitudes toward pre-marital sex among your Chinese and American friends?
26. Probing for cultural difference in attitudes toward pre-marital sex

**Dating Behavior**

27. Are you dating? Or have you ever dated? What do you do? Where do you meet? Who pay the dating expenses? Who ask for/initiate dating? (Probe for details about the gender issue)
28. Whom do you date? Do you choose a date among the Chinese or outside of Chinese ethnic group?
29. When was your first dating (age)? How many dating relationships have you had?
30. Do you think it is okay for women to initiate a date? Do you think there are gender differences in dating behavior based on your experience?

Probing for their personal understanding or experience of gendered difference in who should initiate dating, frequency of dating, number of dates, sexual expectations during dating, meaning of dating in relation to marriage.

19. Do you notice any difference in dating behavior among your Chinese and white friends? Probing for detail in perceived differences in dating behaviors between Chinese and mainstream American cultures.

31. Do you think there are gendered differences in dating behaviors among your Chinese and White friends?

Probing for cultural differences in gendered dating behavior: who initiate dating, frequency of dating, number of dates, sexual expectation during dating, meaning of dating in relation to marriage.

**Appendix B**

Dating Attitudes and Behaviors among Second-Generation Chinese Americans

Baozhen Luo

Informed Consent Form

You are being asked to volunteer as a subject in a sociological research in which you will be asked questions about your attitudes and social activities. The purpose of this research is to explore and identify patterns of dating attitudes and behaviors among the second-generation Chinese Americans. In this research you will be asked to answer the questions regarding your attitudes about dating, marriage, and information about your family. This study is conducted by Baozhen Luo, and the data from the interviews will be used by her in her research thesis in Sociology.

If you choose to participate in the study, you will be interviewed for about one to two hours. The interview will be taped recorded and analyzed by Ms. Luo. The tape will be kept confidential. There are a few structured questions. Most of the questions are open-ended.

There are no foreseeable physical discomforts or risks associated with your participation in this research. However, there may be a few topics, such as attitudes toward premarital sex that will make you uncomfortable. You have the right to not answer any questions and to keep silent when you feel uncomfortable with any questions.

Your participation in this research study is not likely to have a direct benefit for you. However, the knowledge that the researcher gains will fill a gap in the studies of Chinese Americans. It will broaden people's understanding of your community and culture.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. You have the right to refuse to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any time without any penalty. You may skip questions or discontinue participation at any time. We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. Your pseudo-names will be used in the data, in her thesis, and in future publications (if any). Your real name will not be exposed under any circumstances. All personal and familial information will be kept strictly confidential. Once the thesis is completed, the data and the tapes will be destroyed.

If you have any question about the research project, you can ask the interviewer (Baozhen Luo 770.335.4956) or her advisor (Dr. Heying Jenny Zhan, Sociology Department, Georgia State University, 404.451.1846). Susan Vogtner in the GSU Research Office (404.651.4350) can provide you with general information about the rights of human subjects in research.

I have read and understood the above, and I agree to participate.

Signature_____ Printed Name_____Date_____