

strikes. When the Chinese and Japanese became too integrated—and thus had the ability to organize—American businessmen looked to Korea for new sources of labor (Takaki 1989). Therefore, early-on, we see significant prejudice and discrimination launched at Asians by the “powers that be” in the United States.

This early discrimination is reminiscent of more recent discrimination described by Claire Jean Kim (2003) in *Bitter Fruit: The Politics of Black-Korean Conflict in New York City*, whose study of conflicts between Korean American merchants and African American patrons in several large cities reveals that both groups have been marginalized by whites. Historically, whites have pitted minority groups against one another, thereby maintaining power and keeping minorities from joining forces and overthrowing the power structure. This pattern, as described by both Takaki (1989) and Kim (2003), among others, is perhaps one of the earliest examples of blatant discrimination against Asian Americans in the U.S.

Legal Discrimination

Early forms of discrimination against Asian Americans in the U.S. also came in the form of legislation restricting Asian immigrants’ rights. A notable example is that of the Foreign Miner’s Tax of 1850, which—although aimed at *all* foreigners—was enforced primarily in the case of miners of Chinese descent. This tax resulted in Chinese miners earning far less for their harrowing work than did non-Asians (Chan 1991). Related to this, Chinese miners became the target of inflated prices for staples such as bread and eggs; shopkeepers referred to this practice as “mining the miners” (Avakian 2002: 31). Moreover, Chinese miners were the targets of robbery and brutal attacks by whites, who recognized their relative inferiority and lack of legal protection (Chan 1991). In 1857, a reporter for the *Placerville American* characterized the nature

and depth of the problem by declaring: “There ought to be protection against his [the Chinese] having to pay the onerous foreign miners’ tax over three or four times; against sham licenses being given out and taken away from him, and his money extorted; and against being gagged, whipped, and robbed whenever a worthless white rowdy chooses to abuse him thus, for pleasure or profit” (Janisch 1971).

Another notable example of discriminatory legislation aimed at Asian immigrants came in the form of alien land laws, which kept Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Asian Indian immigrants from making a living off the land by prohibiting members of these groups from buying land to farm; curbing their ability to lease farmland; and, prohibiting them from putting land in the name of American-born children in order to skirt the law (Chan 1991; Avakian 2002). The first such law was California’s Alien Land Law of 1913; other states followed suit in the passage of alien land laws, including Arizona (1917), Washington (1921), Louisiana (1921), New Mexico (1922), Idaho (1923), Montana (1923), Oregon (1923), and Kansas (1925) (Chan 1991).

Asian immigrants were powerless with regards to alien land laws, which severely hampered their ability to succeed in their new homeland (Chan 1991). This powerlessness was due primarily to their inability to vote: the first Asians were not permitted naturalization until 1943, under the Magnuson Act, which repealed the Chinese Exclusion Law of 1882. Naturalization to groups other than Chinese Americans was granted as the years passed; however, Asians did not gain full naturalization in terms of immigration and citizenship until the Immigration Act of 1965 (Ancheta 2006). As Angelo Ancheta writes in *Race, Rights and the Asian American Experience* (2006), the Immigration Act of 1965 was a “watershed” moment in the history of Asians in the United States:

The 1965 act marked both the end of a decades-long era of overt governmental discrimination against Asian Americans and the beginning of an era of renewed immigration and population growth. The 1965 act was the culmination of several reversals in the law that rectified anti-Asian subordination by federal and state government. Laws that sanctioned discrimination against Asian Americans in immigration, naturalization, education, employment, property ownership, and family relations, including marriage, had all begun to fall during the 1940s and 1950s. By 1965, Congress could no longer countenance overt racial discrimination in the immigration laws (p.20).

Violence

Early Asian immigrants to the U.S. were also the victims of severe violence, due largely to the disenfranchised and powerless status they held during their early years in the States. According to Sucheng Chan (1991), author of *Asian Americans: An Interpretive History*, violence against early Asian immigrants can be classified into one of three patterns: severe physical violence and/or murder of individuals; impulsive attacks on, and destructions of, Chinatowns; and, concentrated endeavors to push Asians out of specific towns and cities (Chan 1991: 48).

The first pattern of documented violence against Asian immigrants, which targeted Chinese miners, occurred during the 1850s. By 1862, a list of 88 Chinese immigrants who had fallen victim to the violence was drawn up; the exact number of such victims is probably several times higher. Of the 88 victims, 11 were killed by official tax collectors whose employment was only made possible by the passage of the Foreign Miners Tax (Chan 1991). This exemplifies how Asian immigrants were doubly victimized: first by differential treatment under the law, and then again by violent acts made possible by their disenfranchised legal status.

Impulsive acts of violence against Chinese communities began in Los Angeles in 1871, with an attack on residents of Chinatown. A scuffle escalated into shots being fired; this led to looting, and ultimately the hangings and disfigurement of Chinese residents. At the end of the ordeal, there were 21 Chinese victims, 15 of whom had been hanged, four shot to death, and two wounded (Chan 1991: 48-49). Subsequent waves of violence on Chinese communities ensued, including additional incidents in California, as well as in Idaho, Colorado, Oregon, and Washington states. Chinese communities were not the only ones victimized; attacks against Japanese communities in San Francisco led then-President Theodore Roosevelt to send a task-force to investigate the severity and scope of the violence (Chan 1991: 51).

Asian immigrants to the U.S. have also faced expulsion, having been forced out of their communities at startling rates; the primary targets of such expulsions were Asian farm laborers. In 1907, a group of whites succeeded in forcing 700 Asian Indians across the border to Canada from their community in Bellingham, WA (Zia 2000). In 1908, a group of Asian Indian farm laborers was attacked, robbed, and driven out of their camp, just south of Chico, CA (Chan 1991). In 1913, Korean farm laborers about to commence work on an orchard south of Los Angeles were met at the train station by an unwelcoming faction of over 100 unemployed whites, commanding them to leave town or face physical violence. This strategy of intimidation worked: the Korean workers boarded the next available train out of town without ever setting foot on the orchard (Chan 1991).

Japanese immigrants were also the victims of such mass-expulsion attempts: in 1921, Japanese farm workers stationed in the San Joaquin Valley of California were attacked. White workers, unhappy by the employment of their Japanese counterparts on local farms, woke a group of sleeping Japanese workers in the middle of the night, heaved them into trucks, drove

them to the train tracks, and threatened them with lynching if they attempted to return to the farm. Not surprisingly, the Japanese workers did not return (Chan 1991). Another significant attack on Japanese farmers came in the Salt River Valley of Arizona in 1934: a parade of hundreds of cars took over the streets of Phoenix, literally broadcasting a deadline by which all Japanese must have vacated the area; these announcements were followed by a series of bombings aimed at running Japanese farmers out of town (Avakian 2002). Filipino immigrants also found themselves victimized by forced expulsion. From 1928-1930, Filipino farm laborers working near Watsonville, CA, were attacked repeatedly. Mobs of hundreds of white Americans targeted locales known to draw significant Filipino crowds, including a popular dance hall and a Filipino Club. These attacks resulted in the beating of dozens of Filipino workers, and the death of two, an apple picker and a lettuce harvester.

As evidenced by the above discussion, Asian Americans' early years in the United States were fraught with prejudice and discrimination, including dehumanization through commodification, legislation which rendered them powerless, and massive violence at both the individual and community level. Although today considered by many to be "honorary whites," Asians faced many of the same struggles as did other minority groups to the U.S., although these struggles by Asians are often overlooked, or minimized compared to the struggles faced by other minority groups.

Tide Turns, Yet Discrimination Remains, 1965-Present

Legal Discrimination

With the passage of the Immigration Act of 1965, discrimination against Asian Americans was thought by many to be over. However, the passage of this statute did not cause

Asian American discrimination to disappear; it did, however, change the nature of such discrimination from explicit to implicit (Ancheta 2006). Legally-based discrimination against Asian Americans still took place in the U.S. following the 1965 act; however, it was less overt.

It is important to note that since the passage of the Immigration Act of 1965, the Asian American population in the U.S. has undergone a striking change (Ancheta 2006; Zia 2000). When the act was passed, Asian Americans constituted less than one percent of the overall U.S. population, at just 1.4 million. Following passage of the law, immigration from Asia went from a modest seven percent of all legal immigrants to a robust 40% in the 1980s. In the two decades that followed passage of this watershed legislation, Asian immigration increased nearly five-fold. By the 1980s, Asian immigrants constituted close to half of all legal immigrants to the U.S. (Ancheta 2006).

Although the two decades following the passage of the 1965 act witnessed floods of Asian immigrants to the States, more recent legislation has curbed the tide. For example, in 1986, the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) sought to “correct” the 1965 act’s absence of racial and nation of origin categories, and reintroduced a system to track how many immigrants were entering the country, and from where (Chan 1991: 37). One of several outcomes of IRCA was the establishment of an employment verification system, requiring employers to verify the immigration status of new employees—including Americans citizens—or face sanctions. A byproduct of IRCA was that employees in turn discriminated against Asian and Latino job applicants. A study by the United States General Accounting Office (GAO) found that close to one in five employers surveyed admitted to discrimination based on national origin and/or citizenship for fear of sanctioning.

Subsequent legislation has negatively impacted Asians in the United States, including the Immigration Act of 1990, which set a limit on overall legal immigration to the U.S. California's Proposition 187, which banned undocumented immigrants' access to education, healthcare and social services, was felt particularly hard by Asian and Latino immigrants in the state (Ancheta 2006). Scholars have connected the passage of this legislation to hate crimes aimed at Asian and Latino immigrants [see, for example, the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles' report "Hate Unleashed: Los Angeles in the Aftermath of 187," and the National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium's report "1994 Audit of Violence against Asian Pacific Americans"]. Similarly, the 1996 passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, aimed at "fixing" the American welfare system, took a particular toll on poor Asian immigrants in the U.S. (Ancheta 2006).

Violence

Similar to those who came before them, Asian Americans continue to face violence in the United States. However, victimization and violence is not what typically comes to mind when one considers Asian Americans, due to their presumed "model minority" status. In the following paragraphs, I will discuss several notable and more contemporary cases of violence against Asian Americans. In the course of the discussion, a link between the "yellow peril" stereotype and Asian American victimization will become apparent. Asian American legal scholar Rhoda Yen (2000), writing in the *Asian American Law Journal*, uses a modernized version of the "yellow peril" stereotype as an umbrella term to refer to a collection of stereotypes aimed at Asian Americans:

The yellow peril stereotype refers to a view of Asian Americans as foreigners who have different (generally inferior) cultural practices, as well as lower moral and ethical standards from White Americans, and who therefore constitute a threat to American stability. Even for Asian Americans who are second-plus generation, they are often presumed to be outsiders with alien practices and behaviors (p.6).

Perhaps the most notorious case of contemporary violence against Asian Americans is the case of Vincent Chin, a 27-year-old Chinese American who was murdered in Detroit in 1982, one week before his wedding (Yen 2000; Zia 2000; Ancheta 2006). Chin was the target of backlash against “anything Japanese, or presumed to be Japanese” at the time (Zia 2000: 58). In early 1980s Detroit—known as America’s Motor City—tensions were high due to the shaky economy and the related overhaul of the auto industry by Japanese automobile manufacturers. In celebration of his upcoming wedding, Chin’s friends threw him a bachelor party at a local strip club. It was at the strip club that he was targeted due to his race. His attackers were two white men: Ronald Ebens, a plant superintendent at Chrysler, and his stepson Michael Nitz, a recently laid-off auto worker (Zia 2000). Ebens and Nitz mistook Chin for Japanese, and associated him with their recent economic hardships. They called him a “Chink,” “Nip,” and “fucker,” and stated “It’s because of motherfuckers like you that we’re out of work” (Zia 2000: 59). Feelings escalated, and by the end of the night, Ebens and Nitz had brutally attacked Chin with a baseball bat in the parking lot of a nearby McDonald’s. Four days later, Chin died from injuries sustained in the attack (Yen 2000; Zia 2000).

While Chin’s murder and the racism associated with it are appalling, the situation was further compounded when the case went to trial. Neither Ebens nor Nitz was charged with a hate crime; ultimately, Judge Charles S. Kaufman sentenced each defendant to three years of probation, and ordered them to pay several thousand dollars in fines (Yen 2000; Ancheta 2006).

In defense of his ruling, Judge Kaufman argued that Ebens and Nitz were not “the kind of men you send to jail,” and stated that they did not pose a future threat to society:

These aren't the kind of men you send to jail. We're talking here about a man who's held down a responsible job with the same company for seventeen or eighteen years and his son who is employed and is a part-time student...These men are not going to go out and harm somebody else. I just [don't] think that putting them in prison [will] do any good for them or for society...You don't make the punishment fit the crime; you make the punishment fit the criminal (Yen 2000: 11; Lee 2003: 163).

Judge Kaufman went on to say, “Had it been a brutal murder, those fellows would be in jail now,” despite the fact that Chin's beating was so severe that his skull was fractured in four places, and parts of his brain were found splattered across the crime scene (Lee 2003: 163; Yen 2000). Although Judge Kaufman's leniency sparked activism within Asian American communities across the country, the case was largely overlooked by whites (Yen 2000). And while Asian American activism led to an eventual investigation by the U.S. Department of Justice, the two men never served jail time for the murder: although a second trial led to Ebens' conviction of violating Chin's civil rights, a retrial overturned his conviction on a technicality. Nitz was acquitted of all charges (Yen 2000; Zia 2000).

In another case of contemporary Asian American victimization, serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer was enabled by police negligence. In the case of Konerak Sinthasomphone, a 14-year-old Laotian American, police oversight played a pivotal role in Sinthasomphone's murder. In 1991, two white Milwaukee police officers, Joseph Gabrish and John Balcerzak, responded to a 911 call regarding an incoherent teenager stumbling in the street. When the officers arrived, they found a naked and bleeding Sinthasomphone, out in the open, dazed and confused; he had just fled from Dahmer's nearby apartment, and had been drugged. Dahmer soon appeared on the

scene, and convinced Gabrish and Balcerzak that Sinthasomphone was his drunken adult boyfriend. The police believed him, and returned him to Dahmer's care; Sinthasomphone was killed by Dahmer shortly thereafter (see Carlin 2011). This case was gravely mishandled by the police, and has both racist and homophobic overtones: not only did the officers release Sinthasomphone into Dahmer's custody, they failed to record Dahmer's information, and they did not file a formal report about the incident (Carlin 2011; Hutchinson 1997; *The Advocate* 1994). According to Hutchinson (1997), "When the officers returned to the police station, they described the case as a 'boy-boy' incident and joked that they needed 'de-lousing'" (p. 576). Similarly, Davis (1991) notes that insensitive jokes were made by the officers over the police radio about the incident, including the following statement: "Intoxicated Asian, naked male, was returned to his boyfriend [audible laughter]" (p. 12).

Police negligence in the Sinthasomphone case is not an aberration. Asian Americans and other racial minorities tend to receive differential treatment from law enforcement officers in various ways and at various stages of the criminal justice process. As Yen (2000) notes:

[A]sian Americans and other non-white victims tend to receive less attention from law enforcement officers at all stages of the criminal arrest, investigation, and pre-trial processes. Police often assume that Asian and Asian American victims are unable to speak coherent English and instead speak to white witnesses. Asian victims also may distrust police and fail to assert their grievances. As a result, police likely make fewer arrests for Asian and Asian American victims as compared to white victims (p.16).

Another contemporary case in which an Asian American was victimized, and in which police misconduct occurred, is that of Kuan Chung Kao, a 33-year old Taiwanese American who was shot by police officers in 1997 (Chang 2000). The two Ronhert Park, CA, officers, responding to a call regarding an intoxicated man calling for help, arrived at Kao's home, where

he had retreated after facing race-based harassment at a local bar. When the officers arrived, they found him drunk and twirling a large stick. Within 30 seconds, Kao was shot dead by the officers. The officers claimed that they shot Kao because they feared he was a martial arts expert (Yen 2000). One of the officers, Michael Lynch, later referred to Kao as a “ninja fighter” (Chang 2000). Although there was no basis for their fear (Kao was not trained in martial arts), they were cleared of criminal wrongdoing by District Attorney Mike Mullins (Yen 2000; Chang 2000).

In a related 1982 case, Chinese American Steffen Wong was shot while entering his home by his elderly white neighbor, Anthony Simon. According to testimony, Simon explained that he shot Wong out of fear for his own safety: because Wong was an “Oriental,” Simon assumed Wong was a martial arts expert; he and Wong had had verbal disputes in the past, and he feared Wong’s presumed martial arts skills posed a threat to him. During his testimony, Simon went on to explain that he was concerned more “Orientals” would move into the neighborhood. While in reality, Wong posed no threat to Simon, the jury supported Simon’s claim of “self-defense” when they acquitted him of the charges against him (Yen 2000).

The assumption that all Asian American men are trained martial artists, and therefore pose an imminent threat, is what Cynthia Lee (2003) has coined the “Asian-American-as-Martial-Artists” stereotype. As we see in the above discussion, this stereotype has played a significant role in the use of deadly force against innocent Asian Americans. Not only has the stereotype fed into the crimes committed, it has also been accepted by our criminal justice system as an appropriate declaration of self-defense. In both the Kao and the Wong cases, the gunmen were acquitted of wrongdoing.

In a related phenomenon, Asian Americans have faced discrimination, violence, and incarceration due to the presumption that they are gang-affiliated. The 1999 case of Duc Ta, a Vietnamese American, is illustrative of this pattern: when Ta was 16-years old, he was convicted of driving a car from which another passenger fired a gun. While this incident was certainly traumatic for all involved, Ta—who had no criminal record—was tried as an adult and received a sentence of 35-years-to-life. Ta’s case is one that took place during the “get tough era” legislation of the 1980s and 1990s (Mauer 2002); the “juvenile as super-predator” stereotype of the same decades (DiIulio 1995); and, the introduction of “gang-enhancements” (Yoshino 2008) [gang enhancements are years added to one’s sentence for suspected gang involvement]. Ta’s sentence was increased significantly due to a gang enhancement, although he had no prior gang involvement. He was assumed to be a gang member because of his race, and because one of the passengers in the car was affiliated with the “Asian Boyz” gang (Fremon 2011). Therefore, because of his race and the status of one of his passengers, Ta was cast as a perpetrator by the police and an accessory to a crime.

Another case in which Asian Americans were presumed to be gang members features Asian American females: in July of 1993, police in Garden Grove, CA, encountered three Asian American teenagers. They proceeded to detain and photograph them, suspecting gang involvement, based on the fact the girls were wearing “baggy pants and appeared to be loitering by a pay phone” (Yen 2000: 19). In reality, two of the three girls were local honors students, and the suspicion that they were gang-affiliated was completely unfounded (Yen 2000).

In sum, in more recent years, Asian Americans have faced race-based prejudice and discrimination which has at times escalated into brutal violence. Asian Americans have been the targets of misplaced criminal and violent attacks for various reasons associated with their race,

including their perceived racial threat (Blumer 1958), their “Orientalism,” and their suspected gang affiliation. Asian Americans have been the target of a range of crimes; according to the *Asian American Justice Center* (2002) [formerly known as the *National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium*], anti-Asian violence has come in the form of graffiti, property damage, arson, cross burning, vandalism, intimidation, hate mail, physical assault, homicide, and police misconduct. As such, Asian Americans have been the targets of violence and discrimination from both the general public, and law enforcement: they receive differential treatment at various stages and levels of the criminal justice system; at times, they are even victimized by officers of the law, whose very job it is to defend them (Yen 2000). Asian Americans report being victimized at lower levels than their white counterparts, and because of this, police make fewer arrests for Asian Americans who have been victimized (Yen 2000; Ancheta 2006). Even so, approximately 400 incidents of anti-Asian violence were reported per year between 1995 and 2002, resulting in a total of 3,581 incidents (*Asian American Justice Center* 2002: 11). In conclusion, since their arrival to the U.S., Asian Americans have faced prejudice and discrimination in variety of forms, including legal discrimination and violence; this pattern holds into the contemporary era.

“Model Minority,” “Honorary White,” or...? Asian Americans’ Present-Day Status in the United States

In the following section, I will consider the present-day status of Asian Americans. After a brief discussion of research on the Asian American experience in the U.S., including adverse mental health outcomes stemming from prejudice and discrimination aimed at members of this group, I will discuss a third form of discrimination (in addition to legal

discrimination and violence, as noted above) faced by Asian Americans: the “model minority” stereotype.

Recent Research on Asian American Identity and Experience

Although Asian Americans continue to face prejudice and discrimination, this minority group has been considered by many to be “honorary whites” and/or to be the racial group closest to whites. It is perhaps for this reason that research exploring the effects of racism on Asian Americans is lacking (Alvarez & Helms 2001; Perry, Vance & Helms 2009). The study of identity formation as it relates to race is underdeveloped; little previous research on race and identity formation has taken the experience of Asian Americans as its focus (Perry, Vance & Helms 2009). This lack of attention to the mental health outcomes of Asian Americans is problematic, as they continue to face prejudice and discrimination linked to their race, and racism can result in adverse mental health outcomes for members of the targeted group.

A central predictor of mental health is race (Wang, Siy, & Cheryan 2011). According to a report from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2001), racism can be harmful to the mental health of racial minorities. The Department of Health and Human Services sets forth three ways in which racism can negatively impact mental health: 1) Racial stereotypes and negative images can be internalized, denigrating individuals’ self-worth and adversely affecting their social and psychological functioning; 2) Racism and discrimination by societal institutions have resulted in minorities’ lower socioeconomic status and poorer living conditions in which poverty, crime, and violence are persistent stressors that can affect mental health; 3) Racism and discrimination are stressful events that can directly lead to psychological distress and physiological changes affecting mental health (p. 39). Moreover, the literature suggests that the even the *perception* of discrimination produces stress resulting in mental and physical health

problems (Amaro, Russo, & Johnson 1987; Finch, Kolody, & Vega 2000; Kessler, Michelson, & Williams 1999; Ren, Amick, & Williams 1999; Noh, Beiser, Kaspar, Hou, & Rummens 1999).

Asian Americans are not immune to the negative impacts of racism on mental health (Mossakowski 2003; Wong & Halgin 2006). Several studies have demonstrated that racism aimed at Asian Americans has negative outcomes, including poor mental health (Perry, Vance & Helms 2009). For example, research by Tiffany Yip, Gilbert Gee and David Takeuchi (2008), published in *Developmental Psychology*, revealed significant negative feelings as symptoms of psychological distress stemming from racism aimed at Asian Americans.

Benner and Kim (2009), in their longitudinal study of Asian American middle school students, found that persistent discrimination was positively associated with emotional distress and academic struggle; this impact persisted through respondents' high school years. And in their study of male Asian Americans and racial discrimination, Cassidy, O'Connor, Howe, and Warden (2004) demonstrate that as discrimination increases, feelings of self-esteem decrease. Low levels of esteem then manifest into negative health outcomes, including depression and anxiety. Racial discrimination has even been linked to post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) [see, for example, Loo, et al. 2001; Loo, Fairbanks, & Chentob 2005]. More generally, other reports have noted the prevalence among Asian Americans of chronic health problems, including heart disease, pain, and respiratory illnesses (Gee, Spencer, Chen, Yip & Takeuchi 2007); the greater chance of having a Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition disorder (DSM-IV; Gee, Spencer, Chen, Yip, & Takeuchi 2007); and, symptoms of depression (Noh & Kaspar 2003; Noh, Kaspar, & Wickrama 2007). The situation is further compounded by the fact that Asian Americans as a group under-employ mental health services (Sue & McKinney

1975; Leong & Lau 2001); when they do use mental health services, they tend to terminate care at higher rates than whites (Sue 1977; Yamamoto, James, & Palley 1968; Leong & Lau 2001).

Racism also matters within Asian American culture more generally. Karen Pyke and Tran Dang (2003) interviewed 184 Korean American and Vietnamese American young adults and found that racial standards, notions, and stereotypes stemming from mainstream American culture had a direct effect on their identity formation. Moreover, mainstream notions of race shaped respondents' attitudes toward their own racial peers. Study participants regurgitated racist messages through the repeated use of two terms: "FOB" (Fresh Off the Boat) and "whitewashed" (Pyke & Dang 2003). Typically, these two derisive terms were put into use when respondents wished to set themselves apart from other Asian Americans (Pyke & Dang 2003).

Additional research has been conducted in order to gauge the everyday experiences of Asian Americans. Rosalind Chou and Joe Feagin (2008), in *The Myth of the Model Minority*, conducted in-depth interviews with Asian Americans in order to ascertain the lived-reality, or day-to-day experiences, of this ethnic group. Their findings suggest that Asian Americans are the target of race-based prejudice and discrimination from whites, ranging from subtle to blatant.

According to Chou and Feagin (2008), Asian Americans feel intense pressure to conform to white American culture. In response to this pressure, their respondents reported feelings of stress, isolation, and inadequacy. For example, respondents felt they had to hide their home culture, including language, music, dress, food, and other cultural rituals. Moreover, this desire to keep their home culture in the shadows was expressed by respondents across the socioeconomic spectrum: economic and educational success did not shield them from negative feelings related to this pressure (Chou & Feagin 2008).

Chou and Feagin (2008) suggest that while some scholars argue that Asian Americans are quite visible in the dominant culture (following the logic that Asian Americans are highly visible in higher education and in certain sectors of the economy), *invisibility* is actually one of the most dangerous aspects of discrimination toward them. This invisibility comes about via the “white racial framing” of society. Feagin defines the “white racial frame” as follows:

The broad, persisting, and dominant racial frame that has rationalized racial oppression and inequality and thus impacted all U.S. institutions... the white racial frame is a centuries-old worldview and has constantly involved a racial construction of reality by white and other Americans, an emotion-laden construction process that shapes everyday relationships and institutions in fundamental and racialized ways (2010: ix).

Chou and Feagin (2008) contend that, while perhaps not as overt as in the past, Asian Americans continue to experience severe racial hostility. “Some analysts have argued that Asian Americans are ‘lucky’ that they do not face the same ‘invisibility’ and negative imagery that African Americans experience. This view of Asian Americans is incorrect. The Asian American experience with racial hostility and discrimination is also very negative and largely untold, and such an untold experience is indeed a very harmful invisibility” (Chou & Feagin 2008: 3). The authors contend that we must not let the “model minority” stereotype or other “positive” stereotypes of Asian Americans blind us to the reality of the prejudice and discrimination faced by this racial group.

Other research has focused on the assimilation process of Asian Americans into the dominant American culture. The general expectation is that minority groups will assimilate (presumably to a white, Protestant majority) and should, in the process, shed their home culture. In research by Pyong Gap Min and Rose Kim (2000), 15 autobiographical essays penned by young Asian American professionals were analyzed. The essayists identified “more with African

Americans and Latinos than with Whites... thereby adopting a racial identification as a person of color” (Min & Kim 2000: 735).

Historian Ronald Takaki’s 1998 book, *Strangers from a Different Shore*, goes back further to illustrate how Asian Americans’ history in the U.S. lingers. As Takaki suggests in the title, Asians in the U.S. have always borne an “otherness.” Though he notes that many consider Asian Americans “honorary whites,” the difference remains. Takaki maintains that Asian Americans will never be fully accepted into the white mainstream, and the continued use of labels such as “model minority” decrease the chances (Takaki 1998; Sue 1998).

Won Moo Hurh and Kwang Chung Kim (1984), in *Korean Immigrants in America: A Structural Analysis of Ethnic Confinement and Adhesive Adaptation*, explore the experiences of Korean immigrants in the U.S. through interviews. Specifically, their respondents demonstrate “additive” or “adhesive” adaptation—assimilating significantly to the new society, while maintaining a strong national-origin identity (Hurh & Kim 1984). Because our society is still racialized and much interaction is guided by white racial framing, both personal and group identity choices made by Asian Americans are impacted by the racial identity imposed on them.

Nazli Kibria (2002), in *Becoming Asian American: Second-Generation Chinese and Korean American Identities*, studied identity formation through a study of second-generation Chinese and Korean Americans. Her respondents report feeling caught “between two worlds”: that of their Asian immigrant culture and that of the new, American culture (Kibria 2002: 27). In exploring the adaptation of immigrants and their offspring, Kibria suggests there have been two models of assimilation: an “ethnic American” model and a “racial minority” model. Older, more traditional assimilation models have set the stage for understanding Asian assimilation into the

mainstream society through the “ethnic American” model. But, Kibria writes, this is a flawed pattern of logic: the traditional model assumes the ethnic immigrant group is white (of Italian or Irish descent, for example). Kibria (2002) develops the traditional model further to include Asian Americans, suggesting that, as Asian Americans move under the umbrella identity of “Asian American,” they are in the process of updating the old assimilation model to include and account for their unique experiences.

A social scientist who has made progress in terms of studying the lived experience of Asian American assimilation is Mia Tuan (2003). In *Forever Foreigners or Honorary Whites? The Asian Ethnic Experience*, Tuan notes that discrimination by whites is *central* to the experience of Asian Americans. Interview data gathered from approximately 100 third-plus generation Chinese and Japanese Americans reveal that most were well-assimilated into the culture, but a majority also had a strong sense of a racialized identity, which they attributed to the imposition of the label “Asian foreigner” on them. Tuan’s respondents, whose families had been in the U.S. for generations, repeatedly noted the difficulties they faced in staying connected to their national origins. Most whites merely considered them “Asian” or even “Oriental” (that is, whites did not seem interested in accounting for the various cultures/locales in Asia).

Tuan’s research exposes the common lumping-together of Asian Americans as well as many Americans’ unwillingness to take the time or effort to understand their place of origin more specifically. The prevalence of the stereotype of the perpetual or “forever foreigner,” understood as the idea that racial minorities will be forever regarded as the “other” in the U.S., no matter what the numbers tell us, has been documented by other social scientists as well [see Huynh, Devos & Smalarz 2011; Devos & Banaji 2005]. Related to this is the concept of the “cross-race” effect, which occurs when the faces of members of other racial groups are more

difficult to recognize than the faces of those of racial in-group members (Chance & Goldstein 1996; Malpass & Kravitz 1969).

Of course, all of this identity confusion brings new problems. In research that considered the psychological impact of family socialization practices on Asian and white Americans, Anne Saw and Sumie Okazaki (2010) found that most of their Asian American respondents recalled being socialized by their family to suppress emotions, whereas more than half of their white counterparts recalled being encouraged by family to express their emotions freely and openly. The authors report that the experience of suppressing emotions may have led to rates of emotional distress among their Asian American respondents, all of whom suffered from mild affective distress disorder (Saw & Okazaki 2010).

Asian American Panethnicity

The terms “Asian” and “pan” are European constructs (Saaler & Koschmann 2007; Saaler 2002; Koschmann 1997; Ogura 1993). In Europe, the term “Asian” once represented the “other,” a counterpart to “European.” When first conceived, the term “Asian” was virtually meaningless in Asia—it essentialized a region far too large and too diverse to be identified with a single word (Saaler 2002: 8). Thus, while once clear and meaningful to Europeans, “Asian” meant little to the group it was meant to describe.

Sven Saaler notes that underlying the term “Asian” are the following Eurocentric assumptions. The common features (comprising “Asian” identity) usually refer to the following three areas:

- 1) The *cultural* unity of peoples and nations of East Asia.
- 2) The “racial” kinship of East Asian people, and ethnicities which, in Western categorization of “races,” all belonged to the so-called “yellow-race.”
- 3) The *geographical* proximity and the political unity of the East Asian nations (2002: 14-15).

The term “pan” (a Greek prefix meaning “all”) has been used for a number of movements that have typically had in common the goal of expanding nationalism beyond national confines. Importantly, Yen Le Espiritu asks “How, under what circumstances, and to what extent can groups of diverse national origins come together as a new, enlarged, panethnic group?” (1992: 3).

Because immigrants to the States, and their offspring, have been defined as “Asian American” by the host country, Espiritu (1992) sought to see how members of this group reworked their identities until they came to identify with the broad category of “Asian American.” Espiritu (1992) notes that past literature on ethnicity has focused on such issues as maintenance of ethnic boundaries [see Bonacich & Modell 1980; Olzak 1983; Min 2010] and intergroup tension and conflict [see Bonacich 1972; Horowitz 1985; Stephan & Stephan 1985]. A focus on panethnicity would allow him to hone in on how new ethnic boundaries are created and what this process—including intergroup cooperation—looks like. Moreover, by studying panethnicity, he elucidates ethnic change as embedded within a social context, thereby considering the external and structural conditions that mold it, rather than simply addressing the internal processes associated with its construction and maintenance (Lopez & Espiritu 1990; Espiritu 1992).

The “Model Minority” Stereotype

Another form of discrimination faced by Asian Americans, in addition to legal discrimination and violence, mentioned above, has come in the form of what appears to be a *positive* stereotype: the “model minority” stereotype. While at its outset, the “model minority” stereotype appears to be complimentary of this minority group, it has been harshly critiqued by Asian American scholars for diverting attention away from the problems Asian Americans struggle with, for setting Asian Americans up in opposition with other racial minorities (Chin & Chan 1971; Suzuki 1977; Osajima 1998; Zia 2000; Wang, et al. 2011), and for being used to suggest that U.S. society is “color-blind” and/or that racial discrimination no longer exists (Tran & Birman 2010; Lee, Wong, & Alvarez 2009). In the words of Asian American scholars Theodore Hsien Wang and Frank Wu (1996), “Complimentary on its face, the model minority myth is disingenuous at its heart” (p.35); or, what the Chinese would call a *tang yi pao dan*: a “bomb cloaked in sugar” (Li & Wang 2008: 4-5).

Defining the “Model Minority”

Asian Americans are commonly thought of as the “model minority.” Stacy Lee (2009), in *Unraveling the Myth of the Model Minority: Listening to Asian American Youth*, presents a concise definition of this complex and problematic stereotype:

The model minority stereotype depicts Asian Americans as academic superstars. Images of Asian American math geniuses, computer science experts, and high school valedictorians are ingrained in the minds of Americans. According to the stereotype, Asian Americans are successful in school because they work hard and come from cultures that believe in the value of education (Lee 2009: 61).

The myth of the “model minority” is pervasive: Wong, Lai, Nagasawa, and Lin (1998), in their study of perceptions of Asian Americans, report that respondents across the board—whites, blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans—believed that Asian Americans were exceptional in terms of motivation, college preparedness, and career success. Both the popular media and scholarly literature have contributed to the perpetuation of the “model minority” stereotype (Lee 2009). Popular media accounts of Asian Americans focus on their achievements in school and the workplace (Chou & Feagin 2008), as have scholarly accounts (Wang & Wu 1996). As noted above, there is little attention paid to intragroup variability among Asian Americans.

While earlier stereotypes concerning Asian Americans cast them as “others,” as “outsiders”—consider historian Ronald Takaki’s (1993) characterization of early Asian immigrants to the states as “strangers from a different shore,” stereotyped as “heathen, exotic, and unassimilable” (p. 8)—stereotypes emerging in the U.S. in the 1960s cast a noticeably more positive light on this group. As Helen Zia (2000) notes in *Asian American Dreams: The Emergence of an American People*, when turmoil amongst other immigrant groups began to brew, Asian Americans were suddenly recast as the “American Success Story”:

As urban ghettos from Newark, NJ to Watts in Los Angeles erupted into riots and civil unrest, Asian Americans suddenly became the object of ‘flattering’ media stories. After more than a century of invisibility alternating with virulent headlines and radio broadcasts that advocated eliminating or imprisoning America’s Asians, a rash of stories began to extol [their] virtues (p.46).

This stereotype shift is most commonly attributed to the publication of two influential articles: sociologist William Petersen’s 1966 essay “Success Story, Japanese American Style,” published in *The New York Times*, and *U.S. News and World Report’s* 1966 feature article “Success Story of One Minority Group in U.S.” Petersen’s essay argued that Japanese

Americans were better off, economically and educationally, than all other groups, including Caucasians, while the article from *U.S. News* stated that through “hard work,” Asians had become “economically successful” in the U.S. The positive headlines did not stop there—take, for example, a short list of the deluge of positive media associations with Asian Americans, culled from the headlines of that time period to the present day:

“Success Story: Outwhiting the Whites,” *Newsweek*, June 21, 1971

“Japanese Outdo Horatio Alger,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 17, 1977

“Korean Americans: In Pursuit of Economic Success,” *Washington Post*, July 13, 1978

“Asian Americans: A ‘Model Minority,’” *Newsweek*, December 6, 1982

“Asian Americans: The Drive to Excel,” *Newsweek on Campus*, April 1984

“The Triumph of Asian Americans: America’s Greatest Success Story,” *New Republic*, July 15/22, 1985

“America’s Super Minority,” *Fortune*, November 24, 1986

“The Model Minority,” CBS, *60 Minutes*, February 1, 1987

“The New Whiz Kids,” *Time*, August 31, 1987

“Asian American Parenting and Success,” *Pacific Standard Magazine*, December 13, 2010

“The Rise of Asian Americans,” Pew Research Center, June 19, 2012

“Rise of the Tiger Nation,” *Wall Street Journal*, October 27, 2012

“The Great American Success Story: The Rise of Asian Americans,” *Catholic Business Journal*, June 18, 2013

Political leaders have readily adopted these sentiments. Take the following excerpts from then-President Reagan’s “Remarks at a Meeting with Asian and Pacific-American Leaders” (February 23, 1984):

...[I]t's no wonder that the median income of Asian and Pacific American families is much higher than the total American average. After all, it is values, not programs and policies, that serve as our nation's compass. They hold us on course. They point the way to a promising future....

...[W]e need your energy, your values, your hard work, and we need them expressed at the polls and within our political system. Those who escaped oppression have a special appreciation for America's freedom, and those who fled poverty cherish America's opportunity. So I urge you to get involved, stay involved, and run for public office. That is another way of helping in this land of ours...

For modern sociologists, however, the "model minority" is a myth. While typically presented as a positive label, social scientists have shown this label to be untrue and at times, detrimental. For one thing, the statistics offered by journalists and politicians have failed to identify geographic pockets that Asian Americans inhabit—places that have high salaries, but also significantly higher costs of living than other spots in the United States. Thus, alongside all other income-earners, Asian Americans may appear to surpass, but when considered alongside cost of living, a different picture emerges. Consider this from Takaki's (1989) aforementioned *Strangers from a Different Shore*:

... In their celebration of this "model minority," the pundits and the politicians have exaggerated Asian American "success" and have created a new myth. Their comparisons of incomes between Asians and whites fail to recognize the regional location of the Asian American population. Concentrated in California, Hawaii, and New York, Asian Americans reside largely in states with higher incomes but also higher costs of living than the national average: 59 percent of all Asian Americans lived in these three states in 1980, compared to only 19 percent of the general population (p.8).

Our society's adherence to the "model minority" myth has detrimental effects on Asian Americans. For one, they tend to be lumped together as a single group, and a successful one at

that; those segments of “Asian American” who are not succeeding, much less thriving, are overlooked or seen as spectacular failures. This has real consequences, including not receiving needed and deserved social services. As Takaki writes, “[For] groups that are not doing well, such as the unemployed Hmong, the Downtown Chinese, the elderly Japanese, the old Filipino farm laborers... to be out of sight is... to be without social services. Thinking Asian Americans have succeeded, government officials have sometimes denied funding for social service programs designed to help Asian Americans learn English and find employment” (1989: 8). And as Ancheta (2006) notes, the “model minority” image tends to exclude Asian Americans from civil rights programs aimed at correcting past inequities. Moreover, Ancheta (2006) points out that Asian Americans have at times even been considered, alongside whites, the victims of affirmative action. In addition, being lumped into a single category, that of “Asian American,” denies each sub-group’s unique characteristics, and may cause individuals to feel as though they must conform to the expectations of the “model minority” (Takaki 1989; Chou & Feagin 2008).

Racial identity work has traditionally focused on the experiences of African Americans (Jones 1997; Ponterotto, Utsey & Pedersen 2006; Perry, Vance & Helms 2009). Because of their educational and economic success, Asian Americans have been regarded as the “model minority” (Lee 2009), but scholars caution against the label because of the assumptions it brings with it, most notably the idea that race is not relevant to Asian Americans’ sense of identity and mental health. The reality of some Asian American success should not overshadow this group’s experiences with race-based prejudice and discrimination (Wang & Wu 1996).

For many Americans, the term Asian American has become synonymous with success, both educationally and economically. It is commonplace to hear whites describe Asian Americans as “good students,” “nerds,” “smart,” “successful,” and so forth. Chou and Feagin

(2008) contend that the myth of the “model minority” is in fact a form of white-imposed racism. Further, it is particularly insidious because of its “positive” nature, which has allowed the “model minority” myth to escape much criticism. While Asian Americans may stand out academically and economically when compared to other minority groups, studies find that Asian Americans, in particular women and male immigrants, earn less than whites with similar educations and are underrepresented in managerial positions in corporations (Min & Kim 2000; Wang & Wu 1996).

Another reason the “model minority” idea is readily accepted is that whites tend to view the success of Asian Americans (compared to the gains of other minority groups) as proof that the U.S. really is a land of opportunity. The stereotype helps feed the dominant American ideology of individualism; the suggestion is that either Asian Americans are able to overcome adversity, so other minorities should be able to succeed as well; or, that racism no longer exists in America (Tran & Birman 2010). The “model minority” stereotype, however, puts intense pressure on Asian Americans to succeed, both economically and educationally; when they diverge, societal reactions tend to be harsher than reactions stemming from other minority group divergence (Chou & Feagin 2008). Moreover, the label brings with it negative ideas about Asian Americans as shy and socially awkward, with “funny” accents and specific phenotypical traits. Thus, while at the outset this might seem to be a positive stereotype, the “model minority” stereotype is as dangerous as any stereotype (Sue 1998).

In conclusion, the literature on Asian American self-identity indicates that Asian Americans continue to suffer from their minority status, and from the “model minority” label in particular. Minority-group stereotyping casts Asian Americans as a panethnicity; forces them to go without needed and deserved social services; excludes them from civil rights programs; and, puts intense pressure on them to succeed. While we have addressed research on the Asian

American experience in general, the following section will explore research that takes as its focus the stereotype of the “model minority.”

Research on the “Model Minority” Stereotype

Researchers who have specifically explored the “model minority” stereotype include Mari Matsuda and Vijay Prashad. In *Where Is Your Body? And Other Essays on Race, Gender and Law*, Matsuda (1996) suggests that Asian Americans are a “racial bourgeoisie,” used as scapegoats by white America. When the issue of racism comes up, white Americans can point to Asian American success stories as proof of that vaunted level playing field. Prashad (2003), in *The Karma of Brown Folk*, discusses how Asian Americans are labeled the “model minority” and thus are “the perpetual solution to what is seen as the crisis of black America” (p.6). He claims that Americans hold what he calls an “Orientalism” view, seeing Asia as static and unfree, as opposed to the openness of the West. On the other hand, Americans can also negatively stereotype Asian Americans as exotic, barbaric, and/or primitive.

Legal scholar Frank Wu (2003) has also worked to uncoil the myth of the “model minority.” In *Yellow: Race in America Beyond Black and White*, Wu repeatedly demonstrates the way the label of “model minority” benefits whites; he reviews the long history of discrimination against Asian Americans and suggests members of this group face both formal and informal discrimination. Laws have been passed that keep residents from naturalizing, while society informally casts doubt on things such as Asian Americans’ “status” and/or whether or not they even “deserve” to be in this country. A prime legal example, noted earlier, is that of the California Alien Land Laws of 1913, which drove Asian immigrants out of farming by dispossessing them from the land.

In *Bitter Fruit: The Politics of Black-Korean Conflict in New York City*, Claire Jean Kim (2003) becomes one of a handful of scholars who has looked critically at the impact of systemic racism against Asian Americans. Through her study of conflicts between Korean American merchants and African American patrons in several large cities, Kim suggests both minority groups have been marginalized by whites. Kim (2003) finds that whites have essentially placed Asian Americans between them and urban blacks, as though Asian Americans were mere pawns. Kim (2003) notes that while Asian Americans are “allowed” to be closer to whites than any other minority group, they remain at a disadvantage as they are still set apart from—and below—whites in the racial hierarchy. Moreover, because of their intermediate position, they are less likely to identify with or join forces with other minority groups, who may in turn harbor resentment against them. In sum, Kim (2003) suggests that the myth of the “model minority” essentially ostracizes Asian Americans from, well, everyone. Kim (2003) writes that the situation will be slow to change without a change in Asians’ political power.

In his powerful article, “Is Yellow Black or White?” published in the anthology *Margins and Mainstreams: Asians in American History and Culture*, Gary Okihiro (2000) also suggests that, while whites have upheld Asian Americans via the “model minority” myth, Asians have faced and continue to face white racism in a manner similar to that of blacks. Okihiro finds that Asian Americans face educational and occupational barriers, as well as anti-minority abuse and physical violence. He concludes that the marginalization of Asians within the black-white dichotomy “disciplines” Asian Americans and is the “essential site of Asian American oppression.”

Jerry Park (2008) takes the use of the label “Asian American” to campus with his study of second-generation Asian American student leaders at four public universities. His data reveal

that the use of the term “Asian American” has multiplied, as have the ways in which various Asian Americans make sense of this label. Park finds that the term is used to represent both ethnic and religious diversification, as well as the “model minority” stereotype and a cohort identity for second generation Asian Americans. He also uncovers two interlacing threads of cultural discourse that influence the diversification of the definition, one that focuses on the implied racial “otherness” of being Asian American, the other that focuses on the cultural diversity housed within this label. Thus, Park demonstrates that what began as a politically powerful label in the 1960s has morphed into a term with which many identify—a term that is adopted and understood in a variety of ways, both positive and negative.

Scholars who study the concept of the “model minority” are also critical of the fact that it encourages and allows Asian Americans to be seen as a singular group; however, as noted above, this is a diverse and heterogeneous group that is now poorly served by its panethnic label. For example, in her study of working-class Chinese American students, Vivian Louie (2008) elucidates the struggles these students face, and argues that the “model minority” stereotype “obfuscates” the needs of such students. And Lew (2003), in her study of Korean American high school dropouts in urban areas, concludes that geography and social class matter a great deal in terms of educational attainment and outcomes. Calls to understand “Asian America” as more than just the sum of its parts (i.e. to decompose this population, including nation of origin, history of assimilation, and economic standing) have come from a variety of scholars (Goyette & Xie 1999; Espirtiu 1997; Siu 1996; Takaki 1989).

In her critical review of the literature on the psychological impacts of the “model minority” stereotype, Mei Tang (2008) demonstrates that this stereotype creates serious psychological stress for those to whom it is applied. She cites impacts such as internalization,

anxiety and fear, social isolation, and conflict within group and family on Asian Americans cast as the “model minority” (p.127). Tang argues that the stereotype is not backed up by empirical data; the psychological stress it creates is ignored, largely overshadowed by the empirically imprecise discourse which surrounds it (2008). Along similar lines, Matthew R. Lee and Jacqueline Mac (2008), in their study of Asian Americans at a large, predominantly white Midwestern university, found that Asian Americans reported a worse racial climate than their white peers; moreover, ethnic discrimination was a particularly salient stressor for the 137 Asian Americans in their sample. The authors conclude that their findings discredit the “model minority” stereotype, as Asian Americans at their study site reported a less than positive campus climate, in addition to race-based distress.

In the research on Asian Americans and racial identity, several themes have emerged: Asian Americans suffer due to their minority status; their position is more often hindered by, not helped by, the “model minority” label; and, they feel misunderstood by the dominant culture. In the current piece of research, these themes will be discussed with a group of Chinese and Korean American students at one large state university. In addition, the degree to which these students may embrace the “model minority” myth when confronted with a more negative stereotype will be explored.

Asian Americans as College Students

The college experience can be a challenging time, especially for Asian Americans. Many Asian Americans will face hostility on campus, much of it deriving from their current status as the “majority minority” within many college populations (Chou & Feagin 2008). In California, home to the largest Asian American and Pacific Islander population in the country

(approximately five million), college students reportedly use stereotyped language when referring to their Asian American peers. Entire college campuses are even stereotyped: the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) has been nicknamed “The University of Caucasians Lost among Asians,” and the University of California at Irvine (UCI) “The University of Chinese Immigrants” (Lubman 1998).

A recent headline-grabbing guffaw came in the form of a YouTube video posted by UCLA student Alexandra Wallace. In her three-minute video, Wallace complains of the high number of Asians who attend UCLA; she critiques their home-life and family structure; she admonishes them to “speak American”; and, in an ironic twist, she pleads for them to “use American manners.” The UCLA administration decided not to discipline her, citing the video as an exercise of free speech, though they acknowledged that they were “appalled and offended by the sentiments expressed in the video” (*Huffington Post*, Mar.14, 2011).

While Wallace’s video did spark a conversation about race relations and campus climate, college administrators do not appear to have a grasp on the complexity and variety of the Asian American experience. Failing to realize that there are poor Asian families, college administrators have sometimes excluded Asian American students from Educational Opportunity Programs (EOP), which are intended for all students from low-income families. Related to this, Asian Americans seeking education find themselves pitted against and resented by other racial minorities and even whites.

The discipline of social science has played a role in popularizing the image of Asian Americans as “model minorities.” Specifically, assertions have been made that Asian Americans

no longer face structured racism, and that those who do are pathologically deviant (thus, back to the American ideology of individualism) (Nakanishi 1998; Goldberg 1993).

Being the first member of a family to grow up in a new place, as many Asian Americans who are 1st, 1.5, and 2nd generation do, means straddling cultures. The first and second generations pave the way and bear the weight of the struggle. “The responsibility of identifying which cultural traditions to maintain ultimately falls on the generation that grows up straddling the traditional and the American cultures” (Zia 2000: 262). Still, we see the cultural landscape of the U.S. diversifying. Asian American influence can now be seen in virtually all parts of “American” culture, including food, film, music, theatre, fashion, and art.

Even in light of President Reagan’s supportive words, cited earlier, Asian American political leadership lags, and this is significant and worrisome. Possible reasons include the ideas that Asians lack interest in politics and are more comfortable with communitarian societies than democratic ones. However, Zia (2000) asserts that the real reason for low rates of political leadership among Asian Americans is due to America’s sordid treatment of this group. Asian Americans lost at least three generations of political development because of federal laws that barred them from citizenship and full political participation (Zia 2000).

Academic Achievement and Asian Americans: Explanations

Cultural Explanations

The dominant explanation for the success of Asian Americans’ academic achievement is cultural: the cultural thesis suggests that minorities who succeed are those who value education (Lee 2009), and are ambitious, persistent, and focused on upward mobility (Hirschman & Wong 1983; Glazer 1975; Rosen 1959).

One of the earliest interpretations of the cultural thesis hails from William Caudill and George De Vos (1956), who studied Japanese Americans in Chicago. Caudill and De Vos (1956) concluded that their “success” as assimilating immigrants was due to cultural characteristics that aligned with those valued by the dominant group. Asian Americans, they believed, valued the same things the dominant group valued: education, economic security, and hard work.

Another contribution to the cultural thesis comes from Harry Kitano, whose 1969 book *Japanese Americans: The Evolution of a Subculture* points to the “functional compatibility” of Japanese and American culture. Kitano (1969) suggests that Japanese Americans easily adapted to life in the U.S. due to the compatibility of Japanese and American culture. Therefore, falling into step with the dominant group has been less challenging for Japanese Americans than other immigrants. In a related phenomenon, Montero and Tsukashima’s (1977) study of *Nisei* (second-generation Japanese Americans) revealed that those *Nisei* who identified as “American” and were acclimated to American culture had higher levels of educational achievement. More recent work by Nathan Caplan, Marcella Choy, and John Whitmore (1991) suggests that success among struggling Southeast Asian refugees to the U.S. can be attributed to a cultural tendency for all family members to be significantly involved in the education of children. Additionally, Caplan, et al. (1991) suggest that the refugees’ culture overlaps with middle-class American culture. Likewise, Pearce (2006) has pointed to the parental involvement and high expectations many Chinese Americans face as reasons for their high academic achievement.

Other cultural explanations highlight the Asian emphasis on the value of education. Such explanations suggest that Asian culture is more likely to produce academic achievers, so Asian Americans stand out in terms of their academic prowess in the U.S. Family is once again the

focal point, and such explanations emphasize the determination of Asian American children to please their parents through their academic pursuits (Hsu 1971; Mordkowitz & Ginsberg 1987; Sung 1987).

Critiques of the cultural approach include the fact that these explanations do not account for low-achieving Asian Americans. Not all Asian Americans are academic success stories. Thus, how do we explain varying levels of achievement within this group? Likewise, not all Asians are high academic achievers in their native lands, where one would expect cultural influences to be the strongest (Siu 1992).

Additional critiques of the cultural thesis take issue with the claim that Japanese and American cultures overlap, and therefore assimilation has been easier for Japanese compared to other minority groups to the U.S. For example, Schwartz (1970, 1971) has argued that traditional Japanese culture, notably its collectivist nature, stands in stark contrast to America's culture of individualism. Along similar lines, scholars have illustrated that traditional Chinese culture is in fact quite dissimilar from American culture. For example, these differences become apparent in Francis Hsu's (1971) *The Challenge of the American Dream: The Chinese in the U.S.*, and in Betty Sung's (1967) *Mountain of Gold: The Story of the Chinese in America*. And although Montero and Tsukashima (cited above) reported success among more acculturated *Nisei*, John Connor (1975) argues that while there may be an initial surge of success among assimilated Japanese Americans, longer residence in the U.S. among Japanese Americans is associated with lower rates of academic achievement.

Relative Functionalism

Another approach to understanding Asian American educational achievement combines pieces of the cultural approach with social and historical explanations. In his 1980 article “Education and Socialization of Asian Americans: A Revisionist Analysis of the ‘Model Minority’ Thesis,” Bob Suzuki argues that early Asian immigrants directed their children toward education with the hopes this would provide them with a better life—the “American Dream.” Considering that early Asian immigrants were excluded from labor unions and essentially forced into self-employment, it makes sense that these immigrants desired better for their children. Suzuki (1980) posits that the cultural traits Asians brought with them from their homeland, including self-discipline, obedience, and respect, were rewarded by schools in the U.S. and became fixed in Asian American culture. More recent research has arrived at similar conclusions, suggesting that Asian Americans’ success in education can be linked to both social and cultural factors (Hirschman & Wong 1986; Sue & Okazaki 1990). For example, Stanley Sue and Sumie Okazaki (1990), in their now-seminal paper “Asian American Educational Achievements: A Phenomenon in Search of an Explanation,” published in *American Psychologist*, report that discrimination outside of the educational arena has caused Asian Americans to view education as a viable, and preferable, path to success; essentially, it is the least discriminatory realm. Sue and Okazaki (1990) also suggest that Asian Americans’ exclusion from realms such as politics, sports, and entertainment has pigeonholed them into academics, where relative to other groups, they have excelled.

In a related historical pursuit, Charles Hirschman and Morrison Wong (1986) track U.S. Census data since the early 20th century to show that the children of Asian immigrants have received equitable educations, educations which are comparable to those of their white peers. In

their 1986 article “The Extraordinary Educational Attainment of Asian Americans: A Search for Historical Evidence and Explanations,” published in *Social Forces*, the authors suggest that this educational foundation played a significant role in the success of Asian Americans. For example, in 1910, while the percentage of Asian (Japanese and Chinese) children enrolled in school was below their white peers, within a decade, members of this group had caught up to—and in some cases surpassed—their white peers in terms of educational enrollment. By 1920, young white children and Asian American children were enrolled in school at close to the same rate; Asian Americans age 16 and above were enrolled in school at rates higher than those of their white counterparts. By 1930, Asian American children of all ages were enrolled in school at higher rates than their white peers (Hirschman & Wong 1986: 2). These figures are especially remarkable in light of the prejudice and discrimination, including violent attacks, Asian Americans faced during this time period (Hirschman & Wong 1986).

Cultural Ecology

The cultural ecology approach sheds light on both high and low academic success among minority groups. Research by cultural ecologists links identity, historical experiences, and perceptions of opportunity, and considers how these variables have differentially affected school performance for minority group students (Gibson 1988; Ogbu 1978, 1983, 1987, 1989; Suarez-Orozco 1991). Perhaps the most prolific cultural ecologist, anthropologist John Ogbu (1987, 1989), helps elucidate differential academic performance by distinguishing between “involuntary” and “voluntary” minorities. He defines involuntary minorities as those who were brought to the U.S. through slavery or conquest (including African Americans and Mexicans), whereas voluntary minorities are those who chose to come to the U.S., ostensibly in search of the “American Dream.”

Ogbu (1987) posits that voluntary minorities do well in school because they view education as a means by which to reach their success goals. They consider themselves “guests” in the U.S., and therefore they “play by the rules.” For Ogbu, voluntary minorities consider mastery of the host culture a challenge, a game to be won. On the other hand, involuntary minorities, the victims of harsh economic and social discrimination since coming to the U.S., consider social mobility out of their grasp. Thus, they tend to develop their own distinct cultures, rejecting rather than adapting to the culture of the dominant group (Ogbu 1987).

Related to this is a phenomenon set forth by Margaret Gibson and John Ogbu (1991) in their text *Minority Status and Schooling: A Comparative Study of Immigrant and Involuntary Minorities*. Gibson and Ogbu (1991) consider the possibility that immigrants to the U.S. are highly motivated individuals who are inclined to do well and achieve their success goals. Gibson and Ogbu (1991) are suggesting a self-selection effect: voluntary minorities, those who choose to emigrate, are highly motivated and are therefore more inclined to succeed, compared to involuntary minorities.

Critics of the cultural ecology approach point out that it treats Asian Americans as a homogenous group, and does not account for differing levels of success among various Asian subgroups. Moreover, an approach that takes a panethnic view of “Asian” reifies the stereotype that Asian Americans are a homogenous group with similar outlooks, goals, and outcomes in terms of education (Lee 2009).

Tracking and Course Enrollment

Another explanation for the academic achievement of Asian Americans is tied to the academic track on which they are placed early-on. Past research demonstrates that poor and

minority school children are routinely placed at lower levels on the academic track (Joseph 1998; Slavin & Braddock 1993); are more often enrolled in vocational as opposed to college-preparatory programs (Ekstrom, Goertz, & Rock 1988); and, are less often enrolled in honors programming than their white peers (Kubitschek & Hallinan 1996). The exception to this among minority students is Asian Americans: their tracking patterns are on par with, or exceed those, of whites. For example, according to the 1997 *Digest of Educational Statistics* (National Center for Education Statistics 1997), the percentage of high school seniors on the college preparatory/academic track was as follows: 51% of Asian Americans, 46% of whites, 36% of blacks, and 31% of Hispanics. More recent data suggest a similar pattern: according to the 2012 *Digest of Educational Statistics* (National Center for Education Statistics 2012), in 2006, Asian American students were enrolled in gifted and talented programs at higher rates than any other racial/ethnic category: 13.1% of Asian Americans were enrolled in such programs, compared to 8.0% of whites, 4.2% of Hispanics, and 3.6% of blacks. Asians are also disproportionately represented in Honors/AP courses, including the sciences. For example, the *Digest* (2012) reports that of students enrolled in Honors/AP Biology in 2009, 39.7% were Asian American, 24.2% were white, 16.1% were Hispanic, and 14.1% were black.

Reasons for these disparities in tracking and course enrollment are not clear; studies which factor in ability appear to have mixed results (Kao & Thompson 2003; Oakes, et al. 1992). One possibility is akin to the phenomenon evidenced in William Chambliss' (1973) classic study, "The Saints and the Roughnecks," in which boys are labeled good or bad by society, and treated accordingly. Over time, the boys' labels manifest real-world consequences, an example of W.I. Thomas' (1928) "Thomas Theorem" (that if situations are defined as real, they become real in their consequences) and related to Robert K. Merton's (1948) conception of the "self-

fulfilling prophecy” (that a false definition of the situation eventually comes true, in part because we internalize labels and eventually live up to them).

Socioeconomic Status

Another explanation for the academic achievement of Asian Americans is the privileged socioeconomic status of their families, relative to other racial minorities. The suggestion is that with a middle-class lifestyle comes the focus and support necessary for academic success and achievement. Asian American youth of today do have an advantage in terms of the educational levels their parents have achieved (Kao & Thompson 2003). At the same time, factors related to socioeconomic status cannot account for the academic achievement of all Asian Americans, as parental educational attainment fluctuates among sub-groups of “Asian American.” For example, Grace Kao (1995), in her study of Asian American educational attainment, and using data from the National Education Longitudinal Study, reports that among South Asian youth, 81% had at least one parent who graduated from college. In stark contrast was the educational attainment of the parents of Southeast Asian youth, only 20% of whom had a college diploma. To offer another example of heterogeneity among Asian Americans, consider the data offered by Portes and Rumbaut (1996): among Indian immigrants, 64.9% over the age of 25 are college graduates, whereas only 43% of Filipinos, and 34.4% of Koreans, have reached this level of educational attainment. Therefore, socioeconomic status cannot fully explain the levels of educational attainment among Asian Americans, as this is a heterogeneous group with great variety in terms of both socioeconomic status and educational attainment.

Reversal of the Achievement Gap

A final consideration regarding Asian Americans and academic achievement is methodological in nature. Namely, a majority of studies that have tracked the academic achievement of Asian Americans have measured data from primary and secondary school students. A relative dearth of studies has looked at the GPAs of Asian Americans as college students. And, of those handful of studies, there appears to be a reversal in the achievement gap; that is, Asian Americans as college students appear to under-achieve compare to their white peers. For example, Ying, et al. (2001), in the article “Asian American College Students as Model Minorities: An Examination of Their Overall Competence,” explored Asian American academic achievement among 291 Asian American students at the University of California, Berkeley. Contrary to the “model minority” image, their respondents reported having significantly lower GPAs than their white peers. Ying, et al. (2001) propose several possible explanations for this: research indicates that Asian Americans score high on measures of “self-effacement” (p. 234). Thus, the possibility exists that Asian American respondents underestimated their academic success, or overestimated it to a lesser degree than their white peers. Another possibility is related to the fact that Asian Americans are disproportionately enrolled in the natural sciences, an academic area with a reputation for being rigorous and associated with strict grading. It is possible that Ying, et al.’s findings reflect a GPA decline that is common among natural science majors, rather than a GPA decline unique to Asian American college students.

In another study that considered the GPA reversal of Asian American college students, Tseng (2004) studied the official academic records of 3,500 undergraduates enrolled at New York University. She reports a similar GPA reversal as do Ying, et al. (2001). However,

because her study is based on official academic records, Asian American self-effacement is removed from the equation.

In a comprehensive exploration of the existence of GPA reversal among Asian American undergraduates, Dmitrieva, et al. (2008) employ a cross-sectional GPA survey, a cross-sectional psychosocial maturity study, and a longitudinal study of transition from high school to college. In the first study, the authors studied official high school and current college GPA records of 785 Asian American ($n = 553$) and white ($n = 230$) students at the University of California, Irvine. They found that while Asian Americans had significantly higher high school GPAs compared to whites, the pattern reversed when college GPAs were considered.

In the second study, Dmitrieva, et al. (2008) distributed surveys on attitudes and academic achievement to 401 Asian American ($n = 297$) and white ($n = 104$) students at the University of California, Irvine. The authors report that Asian Americans across the board (i.e. freshman-senior year) reported lower college grades than their white peers. And in their third study, Dmitrieva, et al. (2008) employ a longitudinal survey design to study the academic progress of 452 Asian American and white students, collecting data from participants from senior year of high school through sophomore year of college. Forty-eight percent of respondents were Asian American, and 52% of respondents were white (p.239). The authors report that although both Asian Americans and whites experienced a decline in GPA from high school to college, Asian Americans experienced a significantly greater decline.

The phenomenon of the reversal of the achievement gap among Asian Americans is an understudied phenomenon. Preliminary research finds support for evidence of a reversal gap, which runs counter to the image of the “model minority” stereotype. These findings suggest that

Asian Americans may experience unique challenges during their college years, a possibility that should be explored further.

In sum, there exist several competing explanations for the academic achievement of Asian Americans. While the dominant explanation is the cultural thesis, other approaches have value and should therefore be considered. A limitation of a majority of explanations is the tendency for Asian Americans to be treated as a homogenous group with homogenous educational outcomes, which is far from the truth. Future explanations of Asian American academic achievement should account for the heterogeneity within the category “Asian American.”

Summary of Key Findings

From our review of the literature, several key findings emerge. For one, Asian American identity is complex, often problematic, and understudied. Asian Americans feel pressure to adopt to mainstream American society, at the same time as they feel pressure—often from their family—to maintain their ethnic group’s uniqueness. From this, Asian Americans report feelings of otherness, as though they are “caught between two worlds.” Asian Americans also suffer from a duality associated with their minority status: they are at once the “other” and the “model minority.” As previously noted, while the “model minority” stereotype may seem positive on the surface, it is misleading and at times, harmful. Yet, it also causes Asian Americans to be “invisible,” in many instances not receiving needed support associated with being an ethnic minority in society.

Despite evidence to the contrary, the “model minority” stereotype suggests that all Asian Americans are academic superstars. An important place this stereotype plays out is on college

campuses: Asian Americans report both racism—due to their “otherness,” and the perceived threat they pose to their peers academically—and a heightened sense of stress—associated with expectations tied to their “model minority” status.

D. Central Hypotheses Based on a Review of the Literature

This study examines the experiences of Asian Americans on the Virginia Tech campus, before and after the events of 2007 and 2009. A strong case can be made for undertaking a study of this nature: Asian Americans as a group are an understudied population; college campuses appear to be a place where Asian Americans’ “model minority” status would be especially salient, as would the stressors associated with it. The present study allows us to examine the experiences of Asian Americans on campus in general, and as unique circumstances on campus stand to impact this group.

This study considers the campus climate as experienced by Asian American undergraduates at Virginia Tech before and after the events April 16, 2007 (the Virginia Tech Massacre) and January 21, 2009 (the GLC Beheading). From a review of the literature, the following hypotheses emerge concerning the experiences of Asian Americans at Virginia Tech before and after April 16, 2007.

The literature indicates that Asian Americans are met with prejudice and/or discrimination because of their racial/ethnic minority status. Although members of this group are most often hailed as the “model minority,” which at the outset appears to be a positive stereotype, they are in fact victims of race-based prejudice and discrimination, similar to other racial minorities.

- H1.** Asian American undergraduates at Virginia Tech will report experiencing prejudice and/or discrimination associated with their race/ethnicity on campus.
- H0.** Asian American undergraduates at Virginia Tech will not report experiencing prejudice and/or discrimination associated with their race/ethnicity on campus.

The literature indicates that Asian Americans are commonly thought of as the “model minority;” this is assumed to be a positive stereotype. However, evidence suggests that many Asian Americans do not live up to the “model minority” stereotype. Moreover, the “model minority” stereotype results in harm for some Asian Americans: it exacerbates the stress to perform in academic settings, and it overshadows more general problems faced by this minority group in general.

- H2.** Asian American undergraduates at Virginia Tech will report stress and tension while at Virginia Tech stemming from their “model minority” status.
- H0.** Asian American undergraduates at Virginia Tech will not report stress and tension while at Virginia Tech stemming from their “model minority” status.

We expect the confluence of race-based prejudice and/or discrimination, along with stress emanating from the “model minority” stereotype, to result in an uncomfortable, and at times hostile, campus climate for Asian Americans.

- H3.** Asian American undergraduates at Virginia Tech will report that in general, Virginia Tech hosts an uncomfortable, and at times hostile, campus climate.
- H0.** Asian American undergraduates at Virginia Tech will not report that in general, Virginia Tech hosts an uncomfortable, and at times hostile, campus climate.

We expect that students who feel the brunt of race-based prejudice and discrimination will be in favor of initiatives on campus that celebrate diversity and inclusion. Because we expect that Asian Americans will feel the brunt of race-based prejudice and discrimination, we expect that they will favor diversity initiatives.

H4. Asian American undergraduates at Virginia Tech will be in favor of campus initiatives that strive to increase diversity and inclusion in various forms on campus.

H0. Asian American undergraduates at Virginia Tech will not be in favor of campus initiatives that strive to increase diversity and inclusion in various forms on campus.

Race was of central focus in coverage of the events that took place on 4/16/2007 and 1/21/2009. Unlike other recent crimes that have occurred on campus [see, for example, Shear (2006)], the coverage of 4/16 and the event in the GLC strongly emphasized the perpetrator's race (Chong & Huey 2008). Therefore, we expect race-based tensions to be exacerbated by these events, and for hostility toward Asian American undergraduates at Virginia Tech to increase following these events.

H5. Asian American undergraduates will report being subjected to hostility related to the events of 4/16/2007 and/or 1/21/2009.

H0. Asian American undergraduates will not report being subjected to hostility related to the events of 4/16/2007 and/or 1/21/2009.

CHAPTER 2: This Study (Methodology)

A. Methodology

The present study uses several different research methods. This approach is referred to as triangulation: the use of multiple research methods to provide thorough documentation of findings (Creswell 1998; Ely, et al. 1991; Erlandson, et al. 1993; Glesne & Peshkin 1992; Lincoln & Guba 1985). The data for this study come from three sources: in-depth interviews with 18 Asian American undergraduates at Virginia Tech post-4/16/2007 and 1/21/2009, campus climate surveys (1998, 2006), and content analyses of desktop graffiti (pre- and post-4/16). The in-depth interviews are at the heart of the study; they are supplemented by data from campus climate surveys and content analyses.

Explanation of the Relationship between Selected Methodologies

I originally planned to interview 30 Asian American undergraduates about the campus climate at Virginia Tech following horrific events. However, I ultimately only interviewed 18 people. This occurred for three related reasons:

- 1) **Difficulty Locating Study Participants:** I used a number of outlets to advertise my study: I contacted the President of the Asian American Student Union on campus; I posted my “Call for Study Participants” across campus; I used “snowball sampling,” asking interviewees to spread word of my study to their Asian American friends; and, I spoke at an annual Asian culture show, announcing my study and call for participants to a mainly-Asian audience of upwards of 200 people. I handed out fliers and spoke with numerous students during the intermission of the show. Even given these efforts, I was

only successful at finding 18 people who were willing to be interviewed; the most successful method I used turned out to be the snowball method.

For young adults, social media has largely replaced earlier forms of communication, such as telephone and email. Recognizing this, I approached the IRB about using Facebook and/or related social media sites to spread the word about my study. However, the IRB did not approve this change to my research protocol. They specifically said I was not permitted to advertise the study using social media.

2) Theoretical Saturation: When I chose to end the interviews, I had begun to experience theoretical saturation (Glaser & Strauss 1967). That is, I was not hearing unique information about my respondents' experiences; rather, the more interviews I conducted, the more I felt as though I was having the same conversation over and over again. Thus, I determined that the data I had collected were reliable and I could cease data collection.

3) Time: Time was also a determinant of my sample size: I wanted to catch a cohort of students who had been undergraduates at roughly the same time as one another, while also capturing students who had commenced at Virginia Tech before the sensational crimes, students who were at Virginia Tech when the traumatic events took place, and students who came to Virginia Tech after the trauma.

Due to the small size of my sample, I decided to supplement data from the interviews with data from two additional sources: campus climate surveys and content analyses of desktop graffiti. I recognized that the inclusion of additional methods could give me something that the in-depth interviews could not: the perspective of time. The campus climate surveys offer a cross-sectional picture of the campus climate at Virginia Tech between 1998 and 2006. These

data bring us just shy of the campus climate that existed when 4/16 occurred. The content analyses give us a before-and-after sense of campus climate at Virginia Tech: before the events of 4/16, and one semester and one year following this event. That is, in the 2003 analysis, I gauge the campus climate at Virginia Tech, giving me a baseline of campus climate using the novel source of desktop graffiti. I then look to the data on the desks again, one semester after the shootings, and one year after the shootings. I am interested in how the 2003 data (baseline) and the 2007 data (one semester after 4/16) compare, as well as how the 2007 data (one semester after 4/16) compare to the 2008 data (one year after 4/16).

In sum, the use of a mixed-methods approach allows me to gather data on campus climate at Virginia Tech from several different angles: the qualitative approach of in-depth interviews affords me rich, descriptive information about the campus climate as lived by interview respondents. The quantitative approach of surveys allows me to hear from thousands, compared to 20 give or take, of voices. Albeit their voices were standardized (i.e. they had a limited number of responses to offer, as the surveys asked them to answer closed-ended questions); however, hearing from thousands, compared to dozens, makes the information more generalizable across the University's undergraduate population. The quantitative and decidedly novel approach of content analyses of desktop graffiti allows me to gauge campus climate *unobtrusively*; I assess campus climate via the writing on the desk, rather than the words spoken during an interview, or the answers given to close-ended survey questions.

In-Depth Interviews

Male and female Asian American undergraduates at Virginia Tech were interviewed during the spring and fall semesters of 2010, and during the spring semester of 2011. Study

participants were recruited via the Asian American Student Union on campus; from there, study participants referred acquaintances to me. This technique is known as snowball sampling: as study participants refer you to others, your sample gradually builds (Auerbach & Silverstein 2003). Interviews were conducted in neutral locations on campus, including the library and the student center; the interviews were digitally recorded and later transcribed. Pseudonyms were assigned to participants, and recordings were destroyed after transcription.

Interviews were semi-structured in nature, lasting between 45 minutes and 2.5 hours. Semi-structured interviews allow the interviewee to discuss their experiences using their own words, emphasizing what they personally find important, relevant, and so forth. Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to learn about the subculture being discussed; this helps to inform subsequent interviews.

The interview script asked participants to speak broadly about their backgrounds, their education, their racial experiences, and their experiences at Virginia Tech. A typical interview involved the respondent speaking about his or her early family and educational experiences, and then moving on to a discussion of the nature of their social networks during child- and teenagehood. From there, respondents discussed their decision to attend college, and the college-selection process. This led to a conversation concerning their experiences at Virginia Tech.

The total sample for in-depth interviews consisted of 18 Asian American undergraduates at Virginia Tech: 12 males and six females. At the time of the interview, one respondent was a freshman, four were sophomores, four were juniors, and eight were seniors, with one interviewee's class standing N/A. Six ¹ respondents identified as "Korean American," and 12

¹ One respondent who initially identified as "Korean American" was of Vietnamese American heritage.

identified as “Chinese American.” A little over half of respondents had been born in the United States ($n=10$), whereas the remaining eight respondents were born in Asia and immigrated to the United States as children or teenagers.

Respondents majored in a range of subjects; while most majored in STEM areas, several had majors in the liberal arts. The most populous majors among my sample were Hospitality and Tourism Management ($n=3$) and Industrial and Systems Engineering ($n=3$). Two of my 18 respondents majored in each of the following areas: Architecture, Management, Math, and Psychology. And, one of my 18 respondents majored in each of the following areas: Accounting, Biochemistry, Biology, Computer Science, Electrical Engineering, English, Finance, and Marketing. One respondent was undeclared; however, his plan was to double-major in Computer Science and Electrical Engineering. Several respondents were double-, and even triple-, majors; this explains why the number of total majors exceeds 18.

The sample is limited with regards to size and ethnic-group identification. While the original sample was expected to be 30, as mentioned above, I faced challenges recruiting interested participants, and as the interviews progressed, I continued hearing the same information over and over again. This is referred to as theoretical saturation (Glaser & Straus 1967). I was not hearing anything new; the experiences relayed to me by interviewees were strikingly similar, no matter gender, class standing, and so forth. While limited in terms of ethnic group identification (i.e. only Chinese and Korean Americans were interviewed), the sample is representative of what I believe are the two most populous sub-categories of “Asian American” at Virginia Tech. And upon completion of the interviews, no discernable differences in the life experiences of the two ethnic groups surveyed, were apparent.

Campus-Climate Surveys

In recent years, several campus climate surveys have been conducted at Virginia Tech. The use of quantitative surveys in social science research allows the researcher to engage in systematic data collection, and enables systematic comparison between cases on the same characteristics (DeVaus 2002). Quantitative surveys allow us to study, and describe the characteristics of, large populations (Babbie 2002). The present study analyzes the two most recent campus climate surveys measuring student perceptions at Virginia Tech, one conducted in 1998, and a subsequent survey, conducted in 2006.

Consideration of Virginia Tech's history of exclusion is important for understanding its current campus climate. Black men were first admitted to Virginia Tech in 1953, black women were admitted a little over a decade later, in 1966 (Wallenstein 1997). It was not until the 1960s that women were admitted on the same basis as men to all of Virginia Tech's academic programs (Hutchinson & Hyer 2000). In recent decades, efforts have been made to move Virginia Tech beyond its exclusionary history; for example, women's studies and black studies programs were created in 1989 and 1991, respectively. A Diversity Task Force and an annual Diversity Summit were established in 1998 (Hutchinson & Hyer 2000). The administration of campus climate surveys at Virginia Tech demonstrates both the university's allegiance to better understanding, and improving, the campus climate.

The 1998 Campus Climate Survey

During the fall of 1998, undergraduate students at Virginia Tech were surveyed concerning their perceptions of campus climate (Hutchinson & Hyer 2000). The campus climate survey was part of a larger, university-wide initiative aimed at improving the campus climate of

Virginia Tech, outlined in *Update of the University Plan 1996-2001* (Hutchinson & Hyer 2000). The survey was mailed to 3,000 of 13,174 eligible undergraduate students enrolled at the university during the fall semester of 1998 (Hutchinson & Hyer 2000: v). New students—i.e. first-time freshmen—were not included in the sample due to their relatively brief experience with the university.

Purposive sampling, also known as judgmental sampling, was used in this case with regards to race. Purposive sampling is a type of nonprobability sampling in which the researcher selects members for the sample based on those which will be most useful for the purpose of the study (Babbie 2002: 178-179, 447). With the goal of obtaining a satisfactory response rate from racial/ethnic minorities, surveys were sent to all African American, Asian American, Hispanic American, and Native American undergraduates enrolled at Virginia Tech during the fall of 1998 (Hutchinson & Hyer 2000).

The design of the survey, entitled *Undergraduate Student Assessment of Campus Climate*, was fashioned after campus climate surveys used at other large, research-based universities. In an aim to more fully understand diversity, the survey included both questions about *attitudes toward* diversity, and *experiences with* diversity. Additionally, elements of the survey were in-line with campus climate surveys given to graduate students, faculty, and staff at Virginia Tech (Hutchinson & Hyer 2000).

The survey was pretested in several undergraduate courses on campus and with the President's Student Advisory Committee, and was then refined by the Center for Survey Research.

The survey ran four pages in length, and consisted of questions which sought to gather insight in the following areas: students' perceptions of the general climate at Virginia Tech; attitudes about diversity issues; experiences related to campus climate; familiarity with particular services and programs offered on campus; and, basic demographic information (Hutchinson & Hyer 2000).

Surveys were mailed out in hard copy; the initial survey, a cover letter, and a return envelope with postage paid, was mailed in October of 1998. Soon thereafter, a postcard was sent out as a reminder to complete and return the survey. As more time passed and the number of returned surveys slowed, another complete survey package was sent to students who had not yet responded (Hutchinson & Hyer 2000).

Of the 3,000 surveys mailed out, 2,895 were deliverable. Of the deliverable, 1,120 completed surveys were returned. Therefore, the survey's response rate is impressive, at 38.7%.

The 2006 Campus Climate Survey

During the spring of 2006, undergraduates at Virginia Tech were surveyed concerning their perceptions of campus climate, crime on campus, and diversity (Hawdon & Ryan 2006). This survey was part of *The University Community Project*, a cross-sectional study interested in the relationship between crime and attitudes toward ethnic and cultural diversity at Virginia Tech (Hawdon & Ryan 2006). The survey was web-based, and was administered via email. During the last week of March 2006, the registrar's office sent an email to all undergraduates, inviting them to complete the survey. A total of 2,665 students responded to the survey, representing a response rate of approximately 12.4%.

The survey was divided into three sections. Section 1 consisted of items measuring issues of diversity, tolerance and integration. Section 2 consisted of items addressing crime victimization and harassment. Section 3 consisted of items measuring other information, including the demographic characteristics of the respondent.

The sample consisted of students who voluntarily responded. Volunteer samples can be unrepresentative, for they may reflect participants who are already interested in the topic at hand, or in social science research in general (Babbie 2002; Black 1998). Although a drawback of volunteer samples is unrepresentativeness, compounded with a relatively low response rate of 12.4%, the sample in this study adequately represents Virginia Tech undergraduates regarding ethnicity. The sample is within the expected margin of error of (+/-) 2.5% for all ethnic categories but “white”; white students were slightly overrepresented in this sample (Hawdon & Ryan 2006). As noted earlier, this is not surprising, as whites tend to have higher rates of survey participation than do non-whites (Curtin, Presser, & Singer 2000; Groves, Singer, & Corning 2000; Voight, Koepsell, & Daling 2003).

The sample also adequately represents students’ college of study: for example, one of the most populous colleges of study at the University is Engineering (25.3%); 26.6% of respondents were students of Engineering (Hawdon & Ryan 2006). Females are overrepresented in the sample: 58.8% of undergraduates at Virginia Tech are male, while they make up only 48.0% of the sample (Hawdon & Ryan 2006). And, noted earlier, this is a common trend: women are more likely to participate in surveys than men (Curtin, et al. 2000; Moore & Tarnai 2002; Singer, van Hoewyk, & Maher 2000).

We acknowledge that the 2006 survey's response rate of 12.4% is low, especially when compared to the response rate of Hutchinson and Hyer's 1998 survey; this low rate calls into question the reliability of the findings of the 2006 survey. However, the sample is representative in terms of race, and college of study, of the population from which the original sample was drawn. Unfortunately, this low response rate is not an anomaly: national data points to a continuing decline in survey response rates (Dey 1997; Groves 1989; Steeh 1981). Email surveys are not immune to this trend: response rates to email surveys have gone down significantly since their inception in 1986 (Sheehan 2001).

Desktop Graffiti

A content analysis of student-authored graffiti on classroom desktops was conducted during the winter break of 2003, during the winter break of 2007, and at the end of the spring semester of 2008. The purpose of studying desktop graffiti is to ascertain campus climate via unobtrusive (Webb, et al. 2000) means. Graffiti is a revelatory form of communication (Abel & Buckley 1977); thus, one expects that graffiti on student desktops may reveal information about campus climate. The original content analysis of desktop graffiti was undertaken as part of my Master's thesis. After the events of April 16th, 2007, I contacted my advisor, Dr. William Snizek, and asked if he thought undertaking subsequent rounds of graffiti collection was warranted as markers of campus climate following the mass shooting. He supported the idea, and we devised a schedule whereby I would collect two additional rounds of data collection: one at the end of the first semester since the mass shooting, and the second one year out from the mass shooting.

Graffiti in general has long been the focus of social scientific study [see, for example, Read (1935), Reisner (1974)]. Graffiti allows for unabashed self-expression; graffiti affords one the ability to comment on topics too sensitive for public discourse (Gonos, et al. 1976). Graffiti may also reveal valuable information about social deviance: “The analysis of graffiti could provide vital information for investigations of the breakdown of discipline and order, or into the workings of the moronic or ego-starved or bored mind” (Reisner 1974: 8). Although graffiti is an ancient form of communication, graffiti today (since the emergence, in the 1970s and 80s, of a subculture of graffiti writing in New York City, which subsequently spread to cities around the world) is largely regarded as a “youth movement” and a “youth activity” (Hedegaard 2014: 387-388). Graffiti affords the writer a feeling of freedom; Hedegaard (2014) explains that graffiti serves as a form of communication for members of society in a state of transformation. Graffiti allows youth freedom of expression regarding tensions they may experience from being in a state of limbo: at once under supervision (still controlled by adults) and free (faced with the ability to/expectation that they will conduct themselves as adults). A more comprehensive review of the literature on graffiti appears in Chapter 5.

For the first round of graffiti collection (2003), graffiti was collected from nine randomly-selected classrooms in two buildings of interest on campus (one which typically holds liberal arts classes, and one which typically holds engineering classes). From these classrooms, every desk was analyzed for the presence of graffiti.

A total of 419 desks were analyzed. The content of every instance of graffiti found on each desk was recorded. In all, 5,285 individual pieces of graffiti were recorded. After discarding 3,527 examples of graffiti that were unintelligible, the remaining 1,758 specimens of graffiti were categorized in order to reveal the most common themes. Following Gonos, et al. (1976), I

recognized that I might uncover sentiments too sensitive for public discourse, including derogatory remarks aimed at racial minorities. More recent scholars writing on the topic of graffiti suggest that graffiti may be representative of injustices faced by marginalized groups and/or groups in stages of transition (DeNotto 2014; Hedegaard 2014). Thus, I recognized the possibility that I might uncover graffiti of a political nature and/or representative of the voices of marginalized groups in society. And, based on a review of the limited literature on indoor graffiti, I recognized that I might uncover an abundance of sexual graffiti (Trahan 2011; Bartholome & Snyder 2004; Olusoji 2013).

For subsequent rounds of graffiti collection, the methods outlined above were replicated, resulting in 305 desks and 2,605 pieces of graffiti analyzed (2007), and 341 desks and 2,641 pieces of graffiti analyzed (2008). Desks analyzed were selected from the same two buildings used in the original round of data collection, one which hosts primarily liberal arts classes, and one which hosts primarily engineering classes.

In sum, the mixed-methods approach of the current study allows me to gauge the campus climate for Asian Americans at Virginia Tech over time, and in relation to tragic events on campus. At the center of this project are in-depth interviews with Asian American undergraduates at Virginia Tech, which afford me the chance to hear rich descriptions of respondents' experiences on campus. Supplemental to the in-depth interviews are campus climate surveys, which offer us a picture of campus climate at Virginia Tech for close to a decade. Finally, content analyses of desktop graffiti allow me to study campus climate unobtrusively, and rounds out my mixed-methods approach.

CHAPTER 3: Findings from Campus Climate Surveys

This study focuses on the campus climate for Asian Americans at Virginia Tech before and after April 16, 2007 and January 21, 2009, and places it in the context of the social location of Asian American students more generally. Asian Americans, and especially Asian American students, are commonly thought of as the “model minority”: they work hard, study hard, and are successful in their academic endeavors (Lee 2009). However, social scientists contend that the “model minority” stereotype is a myth; moreover, this stereotype has been proven detrimental for Asian Americans in academic settings, as many Asian Americans face hostility on campus (Chou & Feagin 2008).

Two campus climate surveys gauging the climate at Virginia Tech were analyzed. According to the website of the Office of the Senior Vice President and Provost, “Virginia Tech periodically surveys members of the university community about climate issues.” The website makes available several climate surveys, the most recent of which are focused on faculty, and pertain to issues such as campus climate, job satisfaction, and work/life balance. The most recent campus climate survey focused on student perspectives and campus climate hails from 1998. A more recent campus climate survey, conducted in 2006—and the findings of which remain unpublished—was graciously made available to me by committee members Dr. James Hawdon and Dr. John Ryan.

In hopes of accessing more recent campus climate data (the data I have access to are sixteen and eight years old, respectively), I contacted the Office of the Senior Vice President and Provost during the fall of 2014. I asked if more recent data were available, and if so, if I could gain access to them. At first I did not receive a response; when I followed up on my original

message, I was directed to the 1998 data. The Office suggested I contact Associate Provost Patricia Hyer; however, she retired several years ago, and is therefore no longer Provost.

Because of limited access to, or a lack of, campus climate data, the data used for this section of the current study are dated; however, the two campus climate surveys I analyze (1998 and 2006) provide us with data spanning almost a decade, and give us a cross-sectional sense of campus climate over time. These complement the current study's interest in campus climate at Virginia Tech following horrific events; although they do not measure campus climate after April 16th, the 2006 survey provides data from a year before the tragedy. Additional measures that I employ, including in-depth interviews and content analyses of desktop graffiti, measure campus climate after, and before and after, horrific events. Taken together, this study provides us with a snapshot of campus climate at Virginia Tech for Asian Americans spanning from 1998-2011.

Findings from each survey will be considered, with an emphasis on findings from the more recent survey, which was conducted just a year before the events of April 16th. In the following discussion, the experiences of Asian Americans will be the focus. Based on a review of the literature, which states that Asian Americans have a history of racial discrimination in the U.S., are commonly thought of as the "model minority," and, experience negative outcomes from the "model minority" stereotype, I set forth the following hypothesis:

H1: Asian American undergraduates at Virginia Tech will report that they experience an unpleasant campus climate.

H0: Asian American undergraduates at Virginia Tech will not report that they experience an unpleasant campus climate.

A. The 1998 Campus Climate Survey

In the following paragraphs, I discuss the findings of the 1998 campus climate survey as issued in Hutchinson and Hyer's (2000) report "The Campus Climate for Diversity: Student Perceptions." No significant bias is reported by the authors in terms of response rate based on race, gender, or college of study.

Differences by Race/Ethnicity

For the purposes of the current study, I focus on the differences by race/ethnicity found in the 1998 campus climate study. The discussion includes findings from the following racial/ethnic groups, with an emphasis on findings concerning Asian Americans: White, African American, Asian American, and Other Race.

In general, there was consistent variation among racial groups regarding perceptions of campus climate at Virginia Tech: significant differences were found on 13 of 15 climate dimensions. On every single climate dimension, African Americans reported a less welcoming climate than did whites. While Asian Americans reported a less welcoming climate than did whites, their responses were more similar across climate dimensions to whites' than to African Americans'.

Factor 1: Virginia Tech Climate in General

Four items on the 1998 campus climate survey measured the general campus climate at Virginia Tech, and statistically significant differences were found with regards to all four items (Hutchinson & Hyer 2000).

Although their responses were more positive than African Americans,' Asian Americans' responses on all items measuring general campus climate were less positive than were whites'. For example, when asked to rate "Respect by faculty members for students of different racial and ethnic groups," 83.3% of Asian Americans responded "Good/Excellent," compared to 93.0% of whites. When respondents were asked to rate "University commitment to the success of students of different racial and ethnic groups," although Asian Americans responded more positively than did African Americans, their responses were significantly less positive than whites: 58.5% of Asian Americans responded "Good/Excellent," compared to 83.9% of whites.

Factor 2: Interaction with Faculty and Administrators

Four items on the survey asked respondents about their interaction with faculty and administrators at the University. For each item, whites responded more positively than non-whites. On two of the four dimensions, Asian Americans responded less positively than did African Americans. When asked if they agreed or disagreed with the following statement, 30.2% of Asian Americans, compared to 26.3% of African Americans, and 20.7% of whites, disagreed: "I feel that I have received adequate guidance from faculty members at VT." And, when asked if they agreed or disagreed with the following statement, 35.0% of Asian Americans, compared to 32.7% of African Americans, and 30.2% of whites, disagreed: "My current academic advisor is sensitive to my needs and concerns."

Factor 3: Racial/Ethnic Interaction on Campus

Four items on the survey asked respondents about racial/ethnic interaction on campus. Asian Americans were second least positive on two of the four dimensions. For example, 65.7% of Asian Americans rated "Racial/ethnic integration on campus" "Fair/Poor," compared to

47.1% of whites. And, 43.6% of Asian Americans rated “Racial and ethnic relations in the classroom” “Fair/Poor,” compared to just 39.8% of whites.

Factor 4: Social/Interpersonal Climate

Five items on the survey asked respondents about the social climate on campus. For each item, whites consistently responded the most favorably. Asian Americans as a group were the least positive on two of the five items. When asked to agree or disagree with “At VT there are many opportunities to socialize with people different from myself,” 79.1% of Asian Americans agreed, compared to 80.6% Other Race, 82.7% of African Americans, and 86.2% of whites. When asked to agree or disagree with “I feel that I have the opportunity to succeed at Virginia Tech,” 91.9% of Asian Americans agreed, compared to 94.7% of whites, and 94.2% of African Americans and Other Race. While respondents in each of the four racial categories responded to these statements favorably when taken all together, Asian Americans stand out as responding less favorably than members of other races on these two measures, and less favorably than whites on all measures.

Factor 5: General Diversity at Virginia Tech

Nine items on the survey asked respondents about general diversity on campus. Whites responded the most positively on seven of the nine measures. Asian Americans responded the most favorably on one of the nine measures: 42.8% of Asian American respondents agreed with the statement “Students at VT have significant input in university matters,” compared to 42.0% Other Race, 38.8% African American, and 36.2% white. This is the one dimension in this section in which whites responded the least positively than any other category of respondent.

Factor 6: Affirmative Action/Diversity Attitudes

Four items on the survey measured “Affirmative Action/Diversity” attitudes. Across all four items, whites were the least supportive of affirmative action/diversity. For example, whites (52.4%) were the most likely to agree with the statement “Virginia Tech is placing too much emphasis on achieving diversity,” compared to 36.3% of Other Race, 22.7% of Asian Americans, and 11.8% of African Americans. Asian Americans were the most supportive of one of the four items: 95.7% of Asian Americans agreed with the statement “Diversity is good for Virginia Tech and should be actively promoted by students, staff, faculty, and administrators.”

Factor 7: Diversity Teaching

Two items on the survey asked about faculty members’ attempts to integrate topics addressing diversity in their courses. On both, whites responded the most favorably, and Asian Americans responded the second-most favorably. For example, when asked to agree or disagree with “Faculty members at VT attempt to integrate racial/ethnic issues into courses,” 44% of whites, and 36.2% of Asian Americans agreed, compared with 34.3% of Other Race and 31.4% of African Americans agreeing.

Factor 8: Insensitive/Negative Comments or Experiences

Seven items on the survey asked respondents about insensitive/negative comments or experiences they have witnessed or experienced concerning marginalized groups. Respondents were asked “How often have you read, heard, or seen insensitive or negative comments or material at VT about: Racial/Ethnic minorities; women; individuals with disabilities; non-heterosexuals; individuals from the Appalachian region; individuals from different national origins; religious groups.” Whites responded “Rarely/Never” most often concerning five of the

seven items; in one of the two cases—non-heterosexuals—whites and Asian Americans responded “Rarely/Never” at the same rate. In terms of race, African Americans were the most likely to report race-related incidences (70.5% responded “Sometimes/Often”), compared to 54.3% of Asian Americans and 39.3% of whites.

Factor 9: Lack of Freedom to Voice Opinions

Four items on the survey asked respondents how often they felt they had been unable to voice their opinions on a range of topics. African Americans (38.7%) felt the most unable to voice their opinions concerning “racial/ethnic minorities,” stating that they “Sometimes” or “Often” felt unable to voice their opinions. In comparison, 26.6% of Asian Americans, 26.5% of Other Race, and 25.4% of whites stated that they “Sometimes” or “Often” felt unable to voice their opinions concerning racial/ethnic minorities. Asian Americans (12.0%) were the most likely to report that they “Sometimes” or “Often” felt unable to voice their opinions concerning people with disabilities, compared to 11.8% of Other Race, 9.6% of Whites, and 7.8% of African Americans.

Factor 10: Unfair Treatment Based on Personal Characteristics

Nine items on the survey asked respondents the following question along a range of personal characteristics: “How often have you been treated unfairly or harassed at VT because of...” The characteristics considered were: race/ethnicity; gender; sexual orientation; religion; age; accent/dialect; national origin; disability; and, social class origin. Across all but one of the characteristics (sexual orientation), whites reported the least unfair treatment or harassment due to personal characteristics. Asian Americans reported the most unfair treatment or harassment than any other group concerning sexual orientation (4.3% reported “Sometimes” or “Often”) and

national origin (16.7% reported “Sometimes” or “Often”). African Americans reported the most unfair treatment or harassment than any other group concerning race/ethnicity.

Factor 11: Fair Treatment by Groups

Six items on the survey asked respondents if they felt they had been treated fairly or unfairly by various groups on campus and in the community. Respondents were asked “How fairly do you feel you have been treated by: residence hall personnel; professors; teaching assistants; administrators; other students; the Town of Blacksburg community.” As a group, whites consistently felt they had been treated fairly by each of the groups. As a group, African Americans consistently reported the most unfair treatment by all but one of the groups, administrators. Asian Americans reported the strongest feelings of unfair treatment by one of the groups, administrators.

Factor 12: Challenge Derogatory Remarks

Two items on the survey asked respondents how often they have challenged derogatory remarks. Specifically, respondents were asked, “In the past year, how often have you engaged in the following behaviors?: Challenged others on racially/ethnically derogatory comments,” and “In the past year, how often have you engaged in the following behaviors?: Challenged others on sexually derogatory comments.” African Americans reported challenging derogatory remarks the most often: 53.2% of African Americans reported challenging others on racially/ethnically derogatory remarks “Sometimes” or “Often,” compared to 39.2% of Other Race, 37.3% of Asian Americans, and 31.3% of whites. And, 41.7% of African Americans reported challenging others “Sometimes” or “Often” on sexually derogatory comments, compared to 33.9% of whites, 32.3%

of Other Race, and 30.5% of Asian Americans. When it comes to challenging derogatory remarks, we see that Asian Americans' and whites' behavior is similar.

Factor 13: Proactive Diversity Behavior

Three items on the survey addressed proactive diversity behavior. Respondents were asked “In the past year, how often have you engaged in the following behaviors?” Asian Americans were the least likely to report “Taken action to have offensive graffiti removed,” with 93.6% stating that they “Rarely” or “Never” took this action. African Americans were the most likely to report “Sometimes” or “Often” concerning “attending non-classroom programs or activities about gender or issues related to women” (36.1%), compared to 18.9% of Other Race, 16.7% of Asian Americans, and 16.3% of whites. African Americans were also the most likely to report “Sometimes” or “Often” concerning “attending non-classroom programs or activities about the history, culture, or social concerns of various racial and ethnic groups” (58.3%), compared to 40.4% of Other Race, 30.9% of Asian Americans, and 15.4% of whites. From this, we see Asian Americans most resemble whites when it comes to attending programming on gender, and are more similar to African Americans—though far behind—when it comes to attending programming on race.

Factor 14: Derogatory Comments

Five items asked respondents how often they made derogatory statements about various groups, or refused to do so, in the past year. Respondents who fell into Other Race were the most likely (28.4%) to report having made derogatory comments or jokes about gays, lesbians, bisexuals, or transgendered persons, compared with whites (28.0%), Asian Americans (19.8%), and African Americans (16.2%). Members of Other Race were the most likely to report having

made a derogatory statement or joke about persons from the Appalachian region (30.0%) and about persons with disabilities (7.1%). Asian Americans were the second-most likely to have made derogatory statements concerning persons from the Appalachian region (27.0%), compared to whites at 26.3% and African Americans at 19.9%.

Factor 15: Overall Awareness of Services and Programs

Respondents were asked about their awareness of seven services/programs on campus: Women's Center; Project SAFE; Multi-Cultural Center; Black Cultural Center; Academic Enrichment Office; Services for Students with Disabilities; and, Cranwell International Center. African Americans were the most familiar concerning all but one of the services/programs, the Cranwell International Center. 57.7% of African Americans reported familiarity with the Women's Center, compared to 40.6% of whites, 39.2% of Asian Americans, and 36.6% of Other Race. 74.4% of African Americans reported familiarity with the Multi-Cultural Center, compared to 45.1% of Other Race, 39.5% of Asian Americans, and 14.9% of whites. 79.5% of African Americans reported familiarity with Services for Students with Disabilities, compared to just 11.7% of whites, 7.7% of Asian Americans, and 6.9% of Other Race.

Other Race (33.3%) and Asian Americans (18.9%) were most familiar with the Cranwell International Center, compared to 18.8% of African Americans, and 14.8% of whites.

Summary of the 1998 Campus Climate Survey

The 1998 campus climate survey indicates Asian Americans appear to have more positive experiences than African Americans at Virginia Tech, but to have less positive experiences than their white peers. For example, on Factor 2 which measured interaction with faculty and administrators, Asian Americans responded the least positively concerning receiving adequate

guidance from faculty members at Virginia Tech. Asian Americans were also the least likely to believe that their academic advisor was sensitive to their needs and concerns. On Factor 3, which measured racial/ethnic relations on campus, Asian Americans were the second-to-least positive on two items, whereas whites were consistently the most positive concerning racial/ethnic relations on campus. On Factor 4, which measured social/interpersonal climate on campus, Asian Americans as a group were the least positive on two of the five items.

On Factor 9, which measured respondents' ability to voice their opinions, Asian Americans were the most likely to report that they "Sometimes" or "Often" felt unable to voice their opinions concerning people with disabilities. On Factor 10, which measured unfair treatment with regards to personal characteristics, Asian Americans reported the most unfair treatment or harassment than any other group concerning sexual orientation and national origin.

However, when it comes to the importance of diversity on campus, Asian Americans' responses tended to be positive. They also tended to rate the University's efforts at diversifying campus more favorably than African Americans.

The 1998 campus climate survey indicates that overall, whites experience the most welcoming campus climate compared to members of other racial groups at Virginia Tech. They routinely report positive experiences concerning general campus climate, racial interactions, and interactions with faculty and staff. However, when taken altogether, Asian Americans report a generally positive climate at Virginia Tech; on several measures, they more closely resemble their white peers than any other racial/ethnic group.

B. The 2006 Campus Climate Survey

Undergraduates at Virginia Tech were surveyed concerning their perceptions of campus climate, crime on campus, and diversity during the spring of 2006 (Hawdon & Ryan 2006). This survey was part of a larger cross-sectional project, *The University Community Project*, interested in gauging the relationship between crime, campus climate, and diversity at Virginia Tech (Hawdon & Ryan 2006). The survey, which was administered via email, resulted in a total of 2,665 respondents, which represents a response rate of approximately 12.4%.

The sample consisted of students who voluntarily responded. As previously noted, volunteer samples can be unrepresentative (Babbie 2002; Black 1998). Although a drawback of volunteer samples is unrepresentativeness, compounded with a relatively low response rate of 12.4%, the sample in this study adequately represents Virginia Tech undergraduates regarding ethnicity. No significant bias was found in response rate based on race, gender, or college of study. For the purposes of the current study, I am interested in the experiences of Asian Americans at Virginia Tech. Therefore, specific attention will be paid to Asian Americans' responses on the 2006 campus climate survey, especially regarding racial/ethnic relations and diversity, and race and solidarity.

The survey instrument consisted of three major sections: items measuring diversity, tolerance and integration; items measuring crime victimization and harassment; and, items measuring demographics. For the purposes of the current study, the following sections will analyze findings concerning diversity, tolerance, and integration with regards to race. In the following paragraphs, I discuss findings of the 2006 survey based on my analysis of the original data. A summary of these findings was written prior to my analysis as part of the

aforementioned *The University Community Project*, an unpublished report made available to me by the authors, James Hawdon and John Ryan.

Diversity, Tolerance, and Integration with Regards to Race

Value of Diversity

A series of items on the survey measured diversity and its value for respondents. A race crosstabulation reveals that with regards to race, African Americans are the most likely to believe in the importance of diversity. There is an association of weak strength between race and a belief in the importance of diversity (Cramer’s $V=.096$). This is statistically significant ($p \leq .000$). For example, respondents were asked to respond to the following statement: “Contact with those different from me (in race, sexual orientation, etc.) are an essential part of my education” [Table 1].

Table 1: Race and Belief in Importance of Diversity

“Contact with those different from me are an essential part of my education.”	White	African American	Asian American	Other Race
Disagree	24.2%	9.8%	4.0%	14.7%
Neutral	23.2%	15.7%	34.7%	23.4%
Agree	52.6%	74.5%	61.3%	54.1%

African Americans are overall the most likely to believe in the importance of contact with diverse others, with 74.5% agreeing with the statement, compared to 61.3% of Asian Americans, 54.1% of Other Race, and 52.6% of whites.

A related item that measured the value of diversity asked respondents to respond to the following: “Learning about people from different cultures is a very important part of my college education” [Table 2].

Table 2: Race and Belief in Importance of Learning About People of Other Cultures

“Learning about people from different cultures is a very important part of my college education.”	White	African American	Asian American	Other Race
Disagree	18.8%	7.8%	2.7%	17.3%
Neutral	25.5%	9.8%	18.7%	18.7%
Agree	55.7%	82.4%	78.7%	64.0%

A race crosstabulation reveals that 82.4% of African Americans and 78.7% of Asian Americans agree with this statement. Only 55.7% of whites agree with this statement. This is one of few analyses in which Asian Americans’ responses more closely resemble African Americans’ than whites’. The race crosstabulation is statistically significant ($p \leq .000$) but there is a weak association (.096).

A related item asked respondents about their perceptions of faculty’s beliefs on cultural and ethnic diversity. Respondents were asked to respond to the following statement: “Faculty and staff appreciate cultural and ethnic difference” [Table 3].

Table 3: Race and Perception of Faculty/Staff’s Appreciation of Diversity

“Faculty and staff appreciate cultural and ethnic differences.”	White	African American	Asian American	Other Race
Disagree	3.1%	24.0%	9.5%	5.4%
Neutral	21.1%	24.0%	24.3%	27.0%
Agree	75.8%	52.0%	66.2%	67.6%

A race crosstabulation reveals that whites responded most favorably to this statement (75.8% agreed or strongly agreed), followed by 66.2% of Asian Americans, 67.6% of Other Race, and 52.0% of African Americans. Similar to the item measuring respondents’ own perceptions concerning the value of diversity, this is of moderate strength (Cramer’s $V=.116$), but a different trend emerges. Whites are more likely to respond positively to this question, whereas they responded the least positively when it came to learning about people from other cultures.

Finally, respondents were asked to assess whether or not the University actively promotes diversity. Respondents were asked to what level they agreed with the following statement: “This university actively promotes diversity” [Table 4].

Table 4: Race and Belief in University’s Promotion of Diversity

“This university actively promotes diversity.”	White	African American	Asian American	Other Race
Disagree	8.3%	30.8%	13.9%	20.5%
Neutral	18.3%	28.8%	18.1%	20.5%
Agree	73.4%	40.4%	68.1%	50.9%

A race crosstabulation reveals that African Americans are the least likely to agree that the University promotes diversity; just 40.4% agree with this statement. Conversely, a majority of whites and Asian Americans agree with this statement, 73.4% and 68.1%, respectively.

Race and Trust

Three items on the survey measured levels of trust on campus. The results point to a general lack of trust among African Americans, and a general presence of trust among whites. While Asian Americans are generally trusting, they are less so than whites. For example, respondents were asked about their level of trust in students at Virginia Tech: “I trust the students at Virginia Tech” [Table 5]. African Americans had the least trust in fellow students, whereas Asian Americans and whites had the most trust. 76.0% of Asian Americans and 69.8% of whites agreed or strongly agreed, compared to just 44.2% of African Americans.

Table 5: Race and Trust in Fellow Students

“I trust the students at Virginia Tech.”	White	African American	Asian American	Other Race
Disagree	9.5%	34.6%	8.0%	14.7%
Neutral	20.7%	21.2%	16.0%	32.0%
Agree	69.8%	44.2%	76.0%	53.3%

Respondents were also asked about their trust in faculty: “I trust the faculty at Virginia Tech” [Table 6]. African Americans appear to be the least trustful of the racial categories, whereas whites appear to be the most trustful. 86.1% of whites and 82.7% of Asian Americans agreed with the statement, whereas just 46.2% of African Americans agreed. Overall, there is more trust in faculty than in fellow students.

Table 6: Race and Trust in Faculty

“I trust the faculty at Virginia Tech.”	White	African American	Asian American	Other Race
Disagree	3.3%	15.4%	5.3%	5.3%
Neutral	10.6%	38.5%	12.0%	21.3%
Agree	86.1%	46.2%	82.7%	73.3%

Respondents were asked about their trust in staff: “I trust the staff at Virginia Tech” [Table 7]. African Americans appear to be the least trustful of staff, whereas whites appear to be the most trustful. 82.1% of whites and 78.7% of Asian Americans agreed with the statement, whereas 51.0% of African Americans agreed. Interestingly, African Americans appear to be most trusting of staff, and least trusting of fellow students.

Table 7: Race and Trust in Staff

“I trust the staff at Virginia Tech.”	White	African American	Asian American	Other Race
Disagree	4.1%	15.7%	4.0%	6.7%
Neutral	13.8%	33.3%	17.3%	25.3%
Agree	82.1%	51.0%	78.7%	68.0%

Race and Attachment

A series of items measured respondents’ sense of belonging and attachment to the university. One item asked respondents to respond to the following statement: “I am proud to be a member of the Virginia Tech community [Table 8].

Table 8: Pride in Virginia Tech

“I am proud to be a member of the Virginia Tech Community.”	White	African American	Asian American	Other Race
Disagree	2.4%	5.8%	1.3%	8.0%
Neutral	6.5%	26.9%	9.3%	13.3%
Agree	91.1%	67.3%	89.3%	78.7%

Overall, African Americans appear to have the least pride in being a member of the Virginia Tech community. Whites were slightly more likely than Asian Americans to agree that they have pride in being a member of the Virginia Tech community. 91.1% of whites expressed pride in being a member of the Virginia Tech community, while 89.3% of Asian Americans expressed pride in being a member of the Virginia Tech community. Notably, Asian Americans were more likely than whites to express a more moderate level of pride in being a member of Virginia Tech, while whites were more likely to express a strong level of pride in being a member of Virginia Tech. These results are statistically significant ($p \leq .000$).

A related item asked respondents to what level they agreed with the following statement:

“I feel that I am part of the Virginia Tech community” [Table 9].

Table 9: Race and Feeling of Being Part of the Virginia Tech Community

“I feel that I am a part of the Virginia Tech community.”	White	African American	Asian American	Other Race
Disagree	4.7%	15.7%	6.7%	14.9%
Neutral	8.7%	33.3%	21.3%	12.2%
Agree	86.6%	51.0%	72%	73.0%

Whites were the most likely overall to agree that they feel like they are a part of the Virginia Tech community. Asian Americans were 14.6% less likely than whites to agree that they felt like they are a part of the Virginia Tech community, whereas they were 21.0% more likely than African Americans to agree with this statement. The analysis suggests there is an association of moderate strength between ethnicity and feeling a part of the Virginia Tech community (Cramer’s $V=.145$). These results are statistically significant ($p \leq .000$).

Race and Solidarity

A final analysis I considered was the relationship between respondents’ race and feelings of solidarity in a post-tragedy survey conducted in three waves: Wave I: August 25-October 1, 2007; Wave II: February 12-March 13, 2008; Wave III: May 1-May 30, 2009. Solidarity is measured by the composite index of: “I am proud to be a member of the VT community;” “I trust the students at Virginia Tech;” “I trust the staff at Virginia Tech;” “I feel I am part of the VT community;” and “People at VT share the same values as me.”

Table 10: Wave I Race and Solidarity

Wave I	White	African American	Asian American
Strongly Disagree	0.8%	2.3%	0.0%
Disagree	5.9%	20.9%	6.3%
Agree	23.3%	39.5%	25.0%
Strongly Agree	69.9%	37.2%	68.8%

There is a moderate association between race and feelings of solidarity (Cramer's $V=.118$) [Table 10]. Asian Americans have similar response rates as whites, but are slightly more moderate in their responses. African American responses are the outliers, having significantly lower feelings of solidarity compared to other racial groups.

Table 11: Wave II Race and Solidarity

Wave II	White	African American	Asian American
Strongly Disagree	2.1%	7.7%	2.1%
Disagree	10.0%	23.1%	10.0%
Agree	32.2%	53.8%	32.6%
Strongly Agree	55.6%	15.4%	56.3%

In the second wave, there remains a moderate association between race and solidarity (Cramer's $V=.116$) [Table 11]. While the strength of the association is similar to Wave I, there is a change in the responses. Across each racial group, strong feelings of solidarity decreased; the answers given by members of each group are more moderate. Of particular note for the current study, Asian Americans slightly surpass whites in terms of their feelings of solidarity in Wave II.

Table 12: Wave III Race and Solidarity

Wave III	White	African American	Asian American
Strongly Disagree	4.2%	28.6%	0.0%
Disagree	9.6%	14.3%	11.8%
Agree	33.5%	14.3%	29.4%
Strongly Agree	52.7%	42.9%	58.8%

Similar to the previous two waves, Wave III has an association of moderate strength (Cramer's $V=.144$) [Table 12]. The association is higher in this wave, which may lend support for the suggestion that feelings of solidarity are influenced by race, more so than in Waves II and III. However, this could be a result of the low sample size for African and Asian Americans (seven and seventeen, respectively). Of particular note for the current study, Asian Americans in Waves II and III report the strongest feelings of solidarity.

Summary of the 2006 Campus Climate Survey

Based on findings from the 2006 campus climate survey, a picture of campus climate emerges along racial lines. In general, whites experience the most positive campus climate compared to other racial/ethnic groups. While Asian Americans report experiencing a less positive campus climate than whites, they have a significantly more positive experience than African Americans. And, in general, Asian Americans are significantly closer to whites than to African Americans when it comes to their responses on the 2006 campus climate survey.

Earlier, I hypothesized that Asian Americans undergraduates at Virginia Tech would report that in general, Virginia Tech hosts an unpleasant campus climate. The findings of the 2006 campus climate survey suggest otherwise: overall, Asian Americans appear to have very

positive impressions of, and experiences at, Virginia Tech. Asian Americans believe that faculty and the University do a good job promoting diversity. Asian Americans have trust in students, faculty and staff at Virginia Tech. A strong majority (89.3%) of Asian Americans are proud to be a member of the Virginia Tech community. And, a majority of Asian Americans surveyed felt that they were a part of the community. Based on the findings of the 2006 survey, Asian Americans at Virginia Tech do not experience an unpleasant campus climate. To the contrary, they report overwhelmingly positive attitudes when it comes to Virginia Tech along a number of different lines. Compared to other racial/ethnic groups, Asian Americans most closely resemble whites.

The inclusion of data from a post-tragedy survey offers further evidence of this trend. In Waves I, II, and III of the post-tragedy survey, Asian Americans report feelings of solidarity; in Waves II and III, they surpass their white counterparts on this measure. When taken all together, of each of the racial groups, Asian Americans report the strongest feelings of solidarity at Virginia Tech compared to their peers.

Findings from the 1998 survey, the 2006 survey, and the post-tragedy survey do not support my directional hypothesis concerning campus climate: Asian American undergraduates at Virginia Tech will report that they experience an unpleasant campus climate. To make sense of this, several explanations can be considered:

A) Asian Americans *really do* experience a positive campus climate at Virginia Tech.

While this is certainly a possibility, it runs counter to a significant body of literature that suggests that minority students who attend predominantly white colleges and universities rate campus climate significantly lower, or less positive, than their white counterparts

(Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr 2000; Rankin & Reason 2005; Reid & Radhakrishnan 2003).

Related literature finds that among college students, being Asian American on predominantly white campuses is linked to anxiety (Lee, Okazaki, & Yoo 2006; Okazaki 1997).

B) Conversely, Asian Americans are indicating via their responses to the survey questions what they *aspire* to be—fully accepted on campus, indistinguishable perhaps from whites. Having been characterized as “honorary whites” (Bonilla-Silva 2002) or “whitening” (Warren & Twine 1997) via the “model minority” stereotype (Chou & Feagin 2008), there is a possibility that Asian American respondents answered survey questions along the lines of what they hope to be in the near future. Although there exist vocal critics of the idea that Asian Americans are “whitening” [for example, see Kim (2007)], there exists the possibility that Asian Americans have internalized this label and their survey responses are impacted by it.

C) Finally, an alternate but related explanation could be that their responses to the survey questions indicate conformity related to the “model minority” stereotype. As Li and Wang (2008) note, elements of this stereotype include: quiet, law-abiding, motivated, diligent, hardworking, docile, non-assertive, non-opinionated, respectful of their superiors, eager to please everyone...non-demanding and non-complaining (p.24). In answering positively to survey questions, perhaps Asian Americans were simply providing the answers they believed were expected of them, and were living up to their “model minority” status. Characterizing the campus climate at Virginia Tech as unpleasant would run counter to the expectations of the “model minority” label.

C. Comparison of Campus Climate Surveys, 1998 and 2006

While one cannot directly compare the two campus climate surveys [they were conducted using different methods, and did not ask exactly the same questions], both surveys provide us with a general snapshot of campus climate at Virginia Tech. We see that the findings from both surveys indicate that whites, by far, experience the most positive campus climate than any other racial/ethnic group. The findings from both surveys indicate that African Americans, by far, experience the most negative campus climate than any other racial/ethnic group.

While both surveys indicate that Asian Americans experience a less positive campus climate than whites, the 2006 survey indicates that campus climate appears to have improved for Asian Americans at Virginia Tech, compared to the 1998 survey. Specifically, Asian Americans indicate that the University's commitment to diverse others has improved: in 1998, just 58.5% of Asian Americans felt that the University was committed to the success of students of different racial and ethnic groups. By 2006, 68.1% of Asian Americans agreed that the University actively promoted diversity. And, relations between Asian American students and faculty/staff at Virginia Tech appear to have improved: in 1998, 30.2% of Asian Americans felt they had not received adequate guidance from faculty members at Virginia Tech, and 35.0% felt their academic advisor was not sensitive to their needs and concerns. By 2006, 82.7% of Asian Americans indicated that they trusted the faculty at Virginia Tech, and 78.7% indicated that they trusted the staff at Virginia Tech. An additional piece of evidence that campus climate has improved for Asian Americans at Virginia Tech comes in the form of the post-tragedy survey, in which Asian Americans indicate the strongest feelings of solidarity, even surpassing that of their white counterparts.

While one must be cautious about drawing strong conclusions for the reasons stated above, what emerges is the picture that Asian Americans experience a positive campus climate at Virginia Tech, and that this climate appears to have improved since 1998.

D. Concluding Thoughts

Earlier, I set forth the following directional hypothesis concerning campus climate at Virginia Tech: Asian American undergraduates at Virginia Tech will report that they experience an unpleasant campus climate. Data from the two campus climate surveys, and an analysis of the relationship between race and solidarity in the post-tragedy survey, do not offer support for this hypothesis. To the contrary, Asian Americans report a generally positive campus climate at Virginia Tech. Based on survey data, campus climate appears to be improving for Asian American undergraduates at Virginia Tech. The trend continues even following 4/16, an event I worried would negatively impact Asian Americans' experiences on campus. In sum, Asian Americans report experiencing a positive campus climate at Virginia Tech, and campus climate appears to have improved for Asian Americans since 1998.

CHAPTER 4: Findings from In-Depth Interviews

In-depth interviews are at the heart of this study. In-depth interviews are useful when the researcher seeks “deep” information and understanding about their target population (Johnson & Rowlands 2012). Specifically, the method of in-depth interviewing is useful when the researcher seeks to know the lived-realities of interview respondents (Johnson & Rowlands 2012).

Goffman (1989) describes the goal of in-depth interviewing as “subjecting yourself...and your own social situation, to the set of contingencies that play upon a set of individuals, so that you can physically and ecologically penetrate their circle of response to their social situation, their work situation, or their ethnic situation” (p. 125).

Following Goffman, in the present study, I rely on in-depth interviews, supplemented with data from surveys and content analyses, to better understand Asian American undergraduates’ experiences at Virginia Tech in general, and following horrific events. Specifically, I am interested in how their race/ethnicity has affected their experience on campus, as Asian Americans are commonly thought of as the “model minority” (Lee 2009). I am also interested in how their race/ethnicity has played out given their group’s connection to two recent crimes on campus. Thus, I am interested in my respondents’ experiences on campus both regarding their race/ethnicity, and in light of their racial group’s connection to tragic events. Based on my review of the literature, I hypothesize that Asian American students at the University will report tension stemming from their race/ethnicity, their “model minority” status, and their group’s connection to two crimes on campus. My central hypotheses are stated at the end of Chapter 1.

In this chapter, I discuss findings from the in-depth interviews. In the course of the interviews, several themes emerged that are relevant to the current study: 1) Lack of negative racial experiences at Virginia Tech; 2) Abundance of support for the “model minority” stereotype; and 3) Lack of interest in the two criminal events at Virginia Tech. While each of these themes cannot be dealt with independently, as often the conversation incorporates two or more themes, the following discussion of findings is organized along thematic lines. I begin with a discussion of my respondents’ narratives concerning racial experiences on campus. Next, conversations about, and supportive of, the “model minority” stereotype are considered. Finally, a discussion of my respondents’ narratives concerning April 16th and the GLC Incident is offered. Pseudonyms are used in the below discussion in order to protect the identity of interview respondents.

A. Race in the Classroom and on Campus

In the course of the in-depth interviews, I was interested in learning about the racial experiences of my respondents, both in the classroom and on campus more generally. For the most part, the topic of race played an insignificant role during the interviews. Based on my respondents’ accounts, race did not present a challenge to this sample of Asian Americans undergraduates at Virginia Tech.

Occasionally, negative racial experiences were reported. However, on each occasion, they were done so in a light-hearted fashion, and respondents assured me that race really was nothing to worry about. In several instances, respondents went so far as to suggest that race no longer existed, or did not matter. And more often than not, if race was presented as an issue, it was an *intragroup* issue—that is, race was used as a source of humor or taunting by insiders (i.e. members of the racial group in question), not outsiders. Seven respondents explicitly stated that

Asians are the primary source of racist comments and jokes aimed at Asians at Virginia Tech. Moreover, several respondents denigrated their own racial group in the course of the interview.

For example, when I asked Fiona Pi, a female Korean American sophomore [interviewed spring 2010], about racial dynamics on campus, she says that while “Americans” have not made fun of her/her race, in-group members of her race do make racially-based jokes:

Daisy: Have you been made fun of or taunted because of your race...? Has it caused you negative experiences?

Fiona: You know, um, not really. Like, I haven't been made fun of, like, by American people. But you know, like, in our Asian circle, we make fun of each other.

Daisy: Okay. What kind of things do you say?

Fiona: People are like, ‘Can you see out of your eyes?’ [laughs] And, we're like, ‘Oh, all the Asian guys are so short!’ And like, we make fun of each other. But nothing really from the outside.

When I ask Felicia Kang, a female Chinese American junior [interviewed spring 2010], about race and humor on campus, she says that yes, race-related jokes are made—but she finds them funny:

Felicia: I mean, honestly, sometimes you hear people be like ‘Asian Station,’ like look at that big group of people—and honestly, I laugh because I think it's pretty funny. Um, but to other people, yeah, sometime they do find offense, but to me, no.

Daisy: Why do you—do you think it's funny, or?

Felicia: I think it's funny—like honestly there are stereotypes for every single—like race, so honestly, it's like not a big deal, it's just something—it's just like talking about how we're [Asian Americans] bad at driving, that kind of thing—it's just like stereotyping, I think it's funny...

Mark Bok, a male self-identified Korean American senior [interviewed spring 2011], acknowledges that he has experienced prejudice and discrimination while at Virginia Tech; however, it has stemmed from members of the Asian American community, rather than from non-Asians. He states:

I have experienced prejudice/discrimination at Tech. I haven't really experienced any from non-Asians, though. Most of the time, it's just some racial jokes that I know are jokes, so that's okay by me. Most prejudice I've encountered is from other Asians themselves.

A concept that recurs consistently during the interviews is that race and humor go hand in hand: yes, respondents acknowledge having faced racist comments and remarks. However, they claim such comments are not significant or harmful, because they are accompanied by humor. Therefore, such comments do not "count" in the same way that they would were humor not a part of the equation. Moreover, the fact that Asians are most often the perpetrators of such racist comments is a recurrent theme.

I asked respondents specifically about race as a dynamic with professors and fellow students. According to Sam Xu, a male Chinese American senior [interviewed fall 2010], 90% of professors at Virginia Tech are "really great" when it comes to this issue:

Daisy: Let's talk a little about your experience as a student as it relates to your professors. Did you feel because of your race, any positive or negative experiences from like faculty or in classes, so maybe the way that other students treated you or faculty members treated you or was that not an issue?

Sam: That was, no I don't think that was ever an issue. Professors here are for the most part, really great, like, like, personality-wise and person-wise, like I would say like 90% is really great...

And, Felicia responds similarly when I ask about her interactions with professors and classmates:

Daisy: Have you had professors single you out [due to your race]?

Felicia: No.

Daisy: What about classmates?

Felicia: No. Classmates no neither.

When I ask Genji Meng, a male Chinese American senior [interviewed spring 2010], about his experiences in the classroom, he is one of several respondents who claim to have never experienced “anything that is racial, negative-wise”:

Daisy: Do you recall any negative experiences with professors or students, related to your race/ethnicity?

Genji: Uhhhhhh.....

Daisy: Or positive experiences related to your race/ethnicity?

Genji: Uhhh...racist issues, let’s see...

[very long pause]

Daisy: Okay, let’s see, what were we talking about...

Genji: Uhhh...the racist—

Daisy: Yeah, experiences—sometimes they can be positive, sometimes negative—what have you experienced?

Genji: Hmmm... let’s see—negative wise, I don’t think I’ve really experienced anything that is racial...

The long pause in the above exchange is characteristic of my respondents’ reactions when I asked them about race. Getting my respondents to discuss their racial experiences at

Virginia Tech was difficult: I had to nudge them repeatedly to address the topic. This was not due to discomfort concerning the topic, but rather due to their apparent lack of interest in the topic. Along the same lines as Genji, Mason Wu, a male Chinese American junior [interviewed spring 2010], recounts his experiences related to race at Virginia Tech, a discussion in which he, too, proclaims he has not faced racism:

Daisy: Okay, so we hear positive stereotypes of Asian Americans, and negative stereotypes of Asian Americans—positive tend to be more prevalent when it comes to Asian Americans. Have you experienced positive stereotyping while at Tech?

Mason: Not really, maybe I'm just like one of those rare cases where like, I've never experienced like racism, toward myself, just for being Asian anywhere—I mean, a lot of that could just be I grew up in Massachusetts, where no one says anything bad about anybody, but even like down here, I definitely like, I saw it happen many times, but it never happened to me.

Daisy: What did you see?

Mason: Oh, just like um, like in middle school and high school like um someone was just like making jokes about like Asians, you know, if he's not studying right now, he must be sleeping, something like that. Silly things like that. But, I don't know, maybe, it coulda' just been because I was friends with a lot of different people there you know, no one ever felt the need to just like throw barbs at you, you know, for me, I've never... But I've never experienced any racism just for being Asian. Just, just like the harmless, I'd call it like playful, racism—that's just like, I mean it is racism, but it's not like hurtful in any way.

Daisy: Such as?

Mason: Well, it's a lot of the same stuff, it's just like, even among Asians, this is something—I'm just gonna' bring this up real quick, the whole concept of "Asian time"....

Mason first says he has not experienced racism. He then goes on to link racism and humor by stating that he has only experienced “playful racism.” He says that such racism is not harmful; he follows this with an explanation of the concept of “Asian time,” a stereotype that says Asian Americans are notoriously late. So, in the course of our discussion about race-based prejudice and discrimination, Mason himself negatively stereotypes members of his own racial group.

Related to this are statements about racial experiences at Virginia Tech from Finn Chio, a male Chinese American freshman [interviewed spring 2011]. Finn reflects upon racially-based humor among his friendship groups, and the role that he plays in perpetuating racially-based stereotypes:

Daisy: ... So let’s see, have you had any negative experiences based on your race at Virginia Tech while you’ve been here?

Finn: Not really. There has never been a chance where I’ve been, like, ‘Oh... I really wish I weren’t Asian right now.’... Nothing, really.

Daisy: Okay, that’s interesting. And, do you and your friends talk about race as it relates to your experiences on campus, or anything like that?

Finn: We make Asian jokes a lot—like, about people in Computer Science.

Daisy: ... Does it ever bother you, or do you play along with it?

Finn: Sure [I play along with it]—if they knew it offended me, they wouldn’t do it.

Daisy: Okay. I mean, sometimes things get playful, and then you do become uncomfortable. But that doesn’t happen? No.

Finn: I mean, it’s a positive stereotype, so I don’t see why you would—

Daisy: Okay, what types of positive stereotypes?

Finn: Like, how Asians need to be smart and get “A”s and be good at math... or Computer Science... that we have to do a lot of homework and study all the time.

Finn claims to have had no negative race-related experiences at Virginia Tech. According to him, when it comes to race-related jokes, he is complicit and at times, the instigator. In the above excerpt from our conversation, Finn does not grasp how a positive stereotype—especially one featuring his racial group—could be in any way detrimental to members of that group. To Finn, this is illogical.

Hen Ye, a male Chinese American fifth-year senior [interviewed spring 2011], reports that he has had overwhelmingly positive experiences at Virginia Tech. When he does speak on race-relations at Virginia Tech, his comments are positive in nature. In the following example, he refers to a diversity initiative on campus with which he is involved:

Daisy: What experiences, positive or negative, have you had...related specifically to your race?

Hen: To my race, I can't really think of anything specific...

Daisy: Have you experienced any forms of racial discrimination or stereotyping, anything like that at Tech?

Hen: Not really, everyone is really nice. Virginia Tech has been trying to take an initiative on diversity with the Pamplin Multicultural Diversity Counsel. I think this is its fifth year so it's relatively new. It's really accepting I feel on campus.

Hen is one of a number of respondents who say they feel welcome on campus, that the Virginia Tech community—from professors to students to townsfolk—have welcomed them with open arms. Related to this, Fiona says she enjoys the fact that her race allows her to stand out to professors: she believes professors are more willing to help those students they “know.” When I

ask her about positive racial experiences on campus, she makes the following case: “Positive experiences? Um...yeah, it [my race] kinda’ makes me stand out, ‘cause if there’s like a room with 300 kids, there’s only, like, six, seven Asian people...if the professor knows you, they’re more willing to help you out.” And, in the following segment, Mitch Niu, a male Chinese American sophomore [interviewed fall 2010], states that professors at Virginia Tech do not give differential treatment to students based upon their race:

Daisy: So, in terms of the way that you’ve been regarded by your professors and students with regards to your race, have you noticed any differential treatment?

Mitch: Um, not at all.

Daisy: Not at all? Okay. There is this idea of the “model minority,” that Asian Americans are smarter than other students...do you feel like you’ve been called out for that or...

Mitch: No, ‘cause all of my professors, none of them have really chosen people based on their race, it’s more that they’ve chosen people who kind of talk out, and stand out more.

Similar to Hen, Fiona, and Mitch, who we heard from above, Josie Chin, a female Chinese American senior [interviewed fall 2010], reports having had positive experiences while at Virginia Tech. In the following segment, she attributes her growth and maturity to the University:

Daisy: So, in terms of your experiences at Tech, [have you had] any specifically positive or specifically negative experiences?

Josie: Well, I think over the years I’ve just matured a lot, somehow, I don’t really know, it was a very slow process, but I guess—like, like my parents, every time I go home, my parents say that I’ve changed a lot. I don’t know what it is about Tech that makes me

learn so much, like I was able to be more self-sufficient, so I learned how to take care of myself a lot better, and just you know, do things a lot better. Ummm....negative experiences? Well, I guess it's mostly with the Wushu Club—I guess I was a lot more strict back then with the Club and didn't have that much experience teaching—so my motto was to just be really strict with everyone and just train how I was trained, like when I was in school. It was a lot of discipline...it was very demanding on our bodies, I tried to be that kind of coach, one of those tough coaches that makes you do a lot. 'Cause I wanted to see everyone succeed, and sometimes I was a little harsh with people, and I guess I learned from that.

When Josie does address negative experiences she has had, they are related to her involvement with the Wushu Club. Moreover, these negative experiences are self-imposed, and originate from both a desire for her teammates to succeed, and her lack of formal training as a Wushu instructor. Although she notes this was a difficult time for her—one for which she still feels guilt—she characterizes it as a learning experience. Notable is the fact that she does not report negative experiences at Virginia Tech related to her race.

Of my 18 respondents, 12 (66%) explicitly stated that Virginia Tech housed a welcoming atmosphere [expressed as “welcoming,” “warm,” “friendly,” “helpful,” etc.]. Several respondents also note that diversity on campus is important to them: three respondents (16%) state they are members of “diversity” related organizations; 11 additional respondents (61%) state that they are involved with clubs and/or organizations that celebrate race/ethnicity on campus. Only one of my respondents (5%) stated that they wished there was more diversity at Virginia Tech; still, this respondent reported having had an overall positive experience at Virginia Tech.

From the above discussion, the subject of racial relations and experiences at Virginia Tech is of little interest to my respondents. For example, of my 12 male respondents, nine (75%) seemed at a loss for things to say when I asked them about race at Virginia Tech.

Duncan Lau, a male Chinese American senior [interviewed spring 2010], sums up respondents' overall attitude concerning race on campus with the following statement: "Yeah, I think most people would say that, that it's [Virginia Tech] generally a positive experience, I don't think that, I think you'd be hard-pressed to find someone who said that, like, 'Oh my God, it's just been horrible, and like, I've made no friends, and like, everyone's racist,' yeah I don't think you're going to find that. I think it's a good place."

As noted earlier, if and when respondents did note that racism occurred at Virginia Tech, it was most often an intragroup issue: five of my 18 respondents (27%) said when it came to racial remarks, stereotypes, jokes, and so forth, it was the Asians who were the most "guilty" of making fun of other races and Asians. For example, Sam states:

Sam: Yeah, students here are very tolerant I feel like, of all races. Actually I feel like the most like, discriminating race that's here at Virginia Tech is actually the Asians.

Daisy: You mean discriminating towards other races?

Sam: Yeah, I definitely think it's the Asians.

Another theme I heard repeatedly is that being Asian American at Virginia Tech is not particularly salient. For example, Kathy Song, a female Chinese American junior [interviewed spring 2011] claims that being Asian American at Tech is not significant:

Daisy: In terms of your experiences as an Asian American [at Virginia Tech], do positive things stand out—or negative things stand out—and let's start with the positive—think

of experiences directly related to your race and ethnicity that are positive in nature, and have happened on campus or in your classes?

Kathy: Um... you know I'm not really sensitive about my race at all, so I don't think being Asian American is any different... um, I don't know—if that answers it?

Daisy: ... Do you feel that you were treated differently by professors or classmates simply because of your race or no?

Kathy: Mm-mm, no.

Daisy: Okay, and in terms of negative experiences have you had any—tied to that?

Kathy: No, no.

Kathy says that being Asian American, for her, is no different—her race does not cause her differential treatment typically associated with stigma (Goffman 1963), even in the light of recent and high-profile crimes that will be discussed in an upcoming segment. When I ask Fiona about race, she says the topic of race came up in her discussions of April 16th with other Korean American friends. However, she claims they were not “fazed” by the perpetrator’s race:

Daisy: Okay, so did you talk with your friends about it [April 16th]... in relation to race?

Fiona: Hmm...we actually did... with the April 16th I talked with my Korean friend, and um, she actually wasn't, she wasn't fazed by it...fazed about it at all...it could happen at other colleges—like in Texas— it could happen at other colleges in other states, she wasn't fazed about it, so I was like, you know, I wasn't either—I was like—just because he was Asian doesn't mean all of these other Asians are just going to start, going around like shooting people—like, you know, it happens, it was just like a freak accident that he was Korean...

And Trudy Chua, a Chinese American senior [interviewed spring 2010], also discusses April 16th when I ask about race relations on campus more generally. When the massacre occurred, she

was not yet a student at Virginia Tech. She states that, before coming to Virginia Tech, the events of April 16th were “somewhere in the back of her mind.” However, she is not knowledgeable about or particularly concerned with the events of April 16th. Moreover, she has not had significant negative experiences related to her race. The following segment is typical insofar as respondents did not seem concerned about April 16th or race relations, and did not speak at length about these topics:

Daisy: In terms of negative stereotypes of Asian Americans, was there anything that you heard before coming to Tech or when you got here concerning that?

Trudy: I knew about the shootings and that was somewhere in the back of my mind.

Daisy: What had you heard concerning the shootings? Other than we had all heard, like 9/11 we all knew what happened so what did you hear about 4/16 if anything further?

Trudy: The shooter was a Korean American and that was pretty much all I knew. He was a Korean American and the possible indications that would go along with that were that so much pain has been caused on this community from a Korean American.

Daisy: It wasn't a concern of yours upon coming to Virginia Tech?

Trudy: It wasn't a concern of mine and nothing in people's actions caused it to become more relevant to me so it stayed in the back of my mind.

Daisy: In your entire time at Tech you haven't had negative experiences related to your race?

Trudy: Nothing I remember so nothing too big.

My interviews with both males and females, Korean American and Chinese American undergraduates at various stages in their academic careers at Virginia Tech, resulted in a similar story, a story about positive experiences and general acceptance on campus, a story about an overall welcoming campus climate. My concern that Asian Americans would experience a

tense environment on campus (because of their race in general, and their race in connection to recent criminal events) was not supported by the interviews. My respondents were not particularly interested in discussing their race or racial experiences at Virginia Tech—if and when they did report racist comments, such comments most often emanated from a fellow Asian. Repeatedly, I sensed that respondents were thinking to themselves, “Why is a sociologist concerned with Asian Americans’ status at Virginia Tech? It’s all good. We’re Hokies” [the school mascot].

If my respondents were not interested in talking about their racial experiences, what *was* on their minds? What *did* spark their interests? What consumed their thoughts, and perhaps distracted them from topics such as race? The answer may lie in the maintenance of their “model minority” status.

A Note on Diversity

I did hear from several of my respondents that they explicitly sought out experiences with diverse others. From this, I conclude that they would be in favor of initiatives that strive to increase diversity in various forms on campus—however, I did not *explicitly* ask if they were in favor of such initiatives, so I am only making inferences based upon their statements. For example, respondent Trudy Chua purposefully applied for and was accepted to themed housing referred to as Mosaic; specifically, this housing was related to diversity and social justice. Respondent Hen Ye told me that he served on several organizations aimed at increasing diversity on campus including the Counsel of International Student Organizations (which organizes street fairs and an annual Dance of Nations), and the Pamplin Multicultural Diversity Counsel. Mason Wu also cites his membership in a campus group devoted to diversity; specifically, he was part

of Virginia Tech's Diversity Summit; in this role, he took part in a focus group interview about diversity on campus.

B. The “Model Minority” Stereotype

Asian Americans are commonly thought of as the “model minority,” and this stereotype is said to be particularly salient in educational settings (Lee 2009; Chou & Feagin 2008). Therefore, during the course of each interview, I asked respondents about the presence of the “model minority” stereotype at Virginia Tech. Only one of my respondents was aware of and understood this concept in academic terms; his sister had studied it in college and told him about it when he was still a high school student. When I unpacked the concept for respondents, an overwhelming majority reported not receiving differential treatment based on their race; when they did report being treated differently, the importance of such treatment was downplayed—they spoke of race-based stereotyping as acceptable and not harmful.

For example, Genji indicates that positive racial commentary has not been prominent in college—it was something he witnessed as a youngster, but it did not appear on his radar so much in college. After all, he says, everyone in college is smart:

Daisy: What about positive experiences?

Genji: Positive, you mean like ‘Ah, you Asian, you smart’ something like that?

Daisy: Yeahhhh, do you hear a lot of that kind of thing?

Genji: Not, not like a whole lot, because in college like everyone, they all smart, you know like. In high school maybe a little more like ‘Ah, wow.’

Ronald Im, a male Korean American senior [interviewed spring 2011], at first acknowledges the idea behind the “model minority” stereotype, but then quickly downplays its significance.

Several respondents handled the topic in this manner—they briefly acknowledged it, and then shifted the conversation to a discussion of how insignificant the idea behind the stereotype is to them:

Daisy: Do you hear things, like, “model minority” types of things—like, you’re good at math, that sorta’ thing?

Ronald: Yeah... but, these are all things that don’t matter to me.

...

Daisy: Um, okay... so, we talked about some of the stereotypes... in terms of the “model minority”... is this something that—is this a conversation you have even to this day with your friends? Is it something that preoccupies you, or is it something that, once again, you just laugh it off and it’s not a big deal to you?

Ronald: Yeah, not a big deal...

Ronald says the “model minority” stereotype does not matter to him, and is not a topic of concern, or even discussion, amongst his friends. While the stereotype may be out there, it is not having an impact on Ronald, nor, apparently, members of his social circle. Similarly, Felicia claims that she has not been cast as a “model minority” in the classroom:

Daisy: One final thing that I want to ask about is stereotypes—we’ve been talking mostly about negative stereotypes—what about positive stereotypes? Have you been positively stereotyped? And by that we mean—have you heard the term “model minority”?

Felicia: I haven’t actually.

Daisy: ... Have you been singled out specifically by your professors as a “model minority”—not that they use that specific term?

Felicia: Not here, definitely not here...

Along the same lines, in my conversation with Annie Chon, a female Korean American junior [interviewed spring 2011], I asked if she had experienced stereotypes—positive or negative—associated with her race/ethnicity. She replied, “Uh...I can’t think of anything that like stands out as positive or negative, really.” When I followed this by asking if she was familiar with the concept of the “model minority,” her answer was simple: “No.”

And, while Trudy does acknowledge having heard “model minority” comments a couple of times, she states that she has not experienced differential treatment from professors because of her race—not explicitly or implicitly:

Daisy: Sometimes for Asian students, the professors have higher expectations of them or they treat them differently. Do you have any recollection of that?

Trudy: There were a couple of times where people were like, ‘Oh, you’re Asian. You must be good at math.’ I don’t remember a professor ever saying anything like that or hinting anything like that. I think generally my professors my freshman year liked me, but I would attribute that more to how hard I tried in class because of the fear [of failure].

At the same time my respondents claimed that in general, they had not been treated as the “model minority,” they *supported* the stereotype by conforming to it throughout their interviews. When I identified and analyzed the portions of respondents’ narratives that worked to support this stereotype, I found overwhelming support for the stereotype. All respondents supported the idea of the “model minority” in their discussions of themselves as students; many did so repeatedly. This is significant because the bulk of the literature in Asian American studies points to the harmful nature of the “model minority” stereotype for those to whom it is applied. This literature argues that the “model minority” stereotype is particularly harmful for Asian American students (Lee 2009; Chou & Feagin 2008).

For example, in the following, Finn related a monologue about himself and his family members and their accomplishments and plans for the future. Finn's support of the "model minority" stereotype is abundant:

Finn: My dad has always been an "academic;" he has a PhD. Ever since I was a little kid, I always told myself I was going to get a PhD just cause my dad did it... He's an economist.... So, yeah, he's quite the "academic." He went to college at the age of sixteen I believe... He always bragged about that. Yeah.... Graduate level study has always been in the background for me; it was always assumed I would do it... I just always thought that that was how it was supposed to be, so I guess when I was seven maybe [I knew I'd go to graduate school]... TJ: That's the magnet high school in our area.... Number one... [My sister is] at Stanford....did a five-year Master's program in biology... She recently applied to med schools, and she got into all of her top choices.... I would say that my major extra-curricular activity was policy debate... I got really into it. I went to summer camp twice for policy debate; it was like a month-long sleep-away camp where you just debated all day long...My sister actually founded this organization called "Champion Debate" where she—well, she and one friend would teach middle school students high school policy and debate. Then, when she went off to college, I started taking over everything, and then I registered us with the IRS. We're now a 501c(3) organization, 'cause it's a non-profit. We're registered with all the people, and it's really cool....I just want to have at least one contribution to the field [to his field of study]. You know, like the "Chio Amplifier" or the "Chio Effect." I don't know, an invention or research. I don't know yet... I just want something there. I also plan on saving the world....Right now I'm thinking through energy security. I think one reason why there is so much instability in the world is because people can't secure energy as easily as they would like to. Gas prices fluctuate; suppose maybe we go to war for energy—I don't know what your political views would be—but some people think we go to war for energy in the Middle East.... You know, if we had energy security, I don't think there would be a legitimate need for war.... I'm thinking either efficiency—or a different source. One of those two directions. I don't—I haven't done enough in my field

of study yet [keep in mind Finn is a freshman]... I'm pretty sure I want to go somewhere with a bigger name for grad school.

Almost everything Finn shares about himself, including information about himself as a student, and as a participant in extracurricular activities, is supportive of the “model minority” stereotype. During our conversation, there were a few instances in which he denigrated himself as a student when compared to his sister; yet, through his discussion of his sister’s accomplishments at Stanford and getting into medical school, as well as mention of his father’s “academic” status, he continues to offer support for this stereotype. This was a common pattern: if and when respondents did say something negative about themselves as students, they would still offer support for the stereotype in one of several ways. Above, we see Finn extending support for the stereotype via his family members’ accomplishments. In the case of others, such as Trudy, while they acknowledge not always living up to this stereotype, they make it clear that their expectations of themselves remain high:

Trudy: I think I pulled my first all-nighter in third grade and my teacher was so sweet and I guess especially being young, I really looked up to her. She was a wonderful teacher. I remember her being disappointed. This is in regards to a different assignment but I missed the first deadline and I just didn’t turn it in and for a long time she was disappointed. I was sad too because I looked up to her. For a lot of my academic career I was a really big procrastinator and it caused me a lot of guilt.

Several pieces of Trudy’s statement are significant: one, that she pulled her first “all-nighter” in third grade. Second, that when she perceived her teachers were disappointed in her, this “caused her a lot of guilt.” A number of respondents expressed having very high expectations of themselves, and experiencing guilt when they fell short of these expectations. Respondents’ high expectations for themselves were fueled by teachers, as Trudy indicates, as well as by parents.

Guilt also came in the form of God: we hear again from Trudy, who speaks about her former deviant self—a deviancy that took time away from her studies and eventually became an addiction:

Trudy: ...Inside [of me] was a lot of fear. Starting from 6th grade ‘til 10th grade, I had read, basically, pornography. That was a lot of guilt and shame in that.

Daisy: Why were you reading it?

Trudy: I don’t know. I guess it was just the intrinsic sexuality, and curiosity. I knew I shouldn’t because I grew up in a Christian church.

Daisy: How did you have access to it?

Trudy: Through the Internet. I was researching a project on cowboys and then I just found this one thing and that lead to another. I started off because of sexual drive but then it took up my life.

Daisy: Did it take up a significant amount of time? Would you call it an addiction?

Trudy: Yes, I would call it an addiction.

Daisy: How did it end?

Trudy: I think I gave it up for Lent. And then, there was so much guilt I would say to myself ‘How could you go back?’ So I didn’t. That played into not dating [men]...and last semester, I began a personal relationship with God....I began a relationship with Jesus and because that became such a big thing so I call it my “ring fast” like a wedding ring. So, I decided not to date until the end of the academic year.

While Trudy was certainly an outlier in terms of the category of her deviancy and related guilt, a majority of respondents noted that their family—in most cases, their parents—placed a high value on education. In response to this, they communicated a strong desire to not let their family down in terms of their academic success. Many respondents spoke about their parents’ desire for

them to attend an Ivy League institution—needless to say, all respondents were students at Virginia Tech, which is not considered “Ivy League.” This did not stop respondents, such as Duncan, from addressing both high parental expectations, and their attempts to, eventually, fulfill them:

Duncan: ... There’s a lot of pressure to go to a good school, you know, like the stereotype goes, and um, my parents really wanted me to go to UVA, and like I didn’t get into to UVA because like I wasn’t very diligent for my first two years of high school and then became more diligent, and then got to where I am now eventually, but uh—

Daisy: What do you mean, stereotype?

Duncan: Oh, like uh, [Asian] parents are just always like, uh, Harvard, MIT, UVA and this and that, what is VT? You know, like, forget that....

Duncan then attempts to add to his current school’s prestige, noting that “Tech is like, Tech’s like where UVA was at when I was applying, you know? It’s like 3.9 to get in or something like that, in fact, I know UVA was like 3.9 and Tech was like 3.5...” And, even though Virginia Tech’s prestige has apparently increased, parents, have no fear: near the end of the interview, Duncan reveals that his parents’ dreams will come true, after all: “... I think I’ve done quite well, I’m going to UVA med school next year...”

In sum, all of my Korean and Chinese American respondents fit the stereotype of the “model minority.” Several did so quite strongly. When respondents spoke critically of themselves or their academic performance, they did so in such a way to still offer support for this stereotype: they either diminished their accomplishments, but in comparison to another Asian American, such as a family member; or, they admitted their “former selves” had slipped up here and there, but their biography always ended on a positive note. Not a single respondent stated

that academics and/or success were unimportant; none worked to actively combat the myth of the “model minority,” even in the rare instances when they were critical of themselves. Self-criticism was not the norm, and was fleeting. The overwhelming message from each interview was that the respondent was a high achiever to whom success mattered a great deal.

C. The Mass Shooting

Beyond gaining an understanding of my respondents’ experiences on campus related to their race, I was interested in hearing about their experiences in light of two criminal events on campus in which Asians were the perpetrators. In order to better understand the importance of April 16th in my respondents’ accounts of their time at Virginia Tech, I used a strategy that may seem counterintuitive: I did not raise the subject. I was interested if, in conversations about their experiences at Virginia Tech, and in particular, their experiences with race/ethnicity at Virginia Tech, April 16th was something that my respondents brought up *independently*.

In all but three cases, respondents did mention April 16th at some point in the course of the interview. However, although most respondents mentioned it, they did so in a casual manner; at times, the topic was an afterthought. For example, Duncan acknowledges that April 16th caused issues for members of the Asian American community. However, according to him, these problems did not warrant public protest:

Duncan: I mean, we’ll mention it [racist jokes], but it’s not like a huge deal, you know? And, another thing, is like, you know, the events of, like, the April 16th thing did cause some issues for a few of my friends, one was, he got his apartment egged or something and things like that.

Daisy: And why did he think he was the target of that?

Duncan: ‘Cause he was Asian, or Chinese, you know?

Daisy: Do you recall his reaction after that?

Duncan: He just told us about it and we were like oh, that's so fucked up, I mean he wasn't like terribly distraught we, everyone, just thought it was messed up, but it's like you know we're not going to go light a bunch of torches and get mad or something.

Daisy: So, since April 16th, have you noticed a change in the way you perceive yourself, or are perceived by the student body or community, or [similar changes] in your friends?

Duncan: Um...not terribly, you know, there is more concern about like people are going to start like judging us or like, yeah, we might be afraid more ignorant people might just like think about things like that, but I haven't noticed anything, I haven't experienced anything terribly bad myself.

In this segment, Duncan acknowledges an incident stemming from April 16th, and the initial concerns that he and his friends shared related to the mass shooting. However, he rejects the idea that misguided backlash toward the Asian American community is something to be very concerned about: "... he wasn't like terribly distraught..." He also implies that members of his racial group are not interested in drawing attention to the incident via public protest: "... it's not like you know we're going to go light a bunch of torches and get mad or something."

When I ask Fiona about race relations on campus, she brings up the topic of 4/16 and the GLC Incident. Similar to Duncan, she acknowledges that members of her social group were initially concerned about the reputation of Asians and Asian Americans at Virginia Tech following both crimes:

Daisy: While you've been Tech, have you had positive or negative experiences associated with your race or ethnicity?

Fiona: Even after the Cho guy happened...

Daisy: 4/16, yeah...

Fiona: Um, like, we truly...in the Fellowship [Christian Fellowship], we were like ‘What the heck is wrong with Asian people at Tech?’ Like, 4/16 and then the beheading...you know, it’s like ‘Why are Asian people doing so, like, stupid things here?’ And then like, people outside of Tech were like, ‘Oh, do you get condemned for like those things happening?’ But then I feel like the community sees it as, like, one crazy person doing it [rather] than like ‘Asian people are crazy.’

Daisy: Okay, so when you first had those fears, did you guys like talk about it, at your meetings?

Fiona: I would just like, bring it up with my friends. Like, ‘What the heck is going on with the Asian people here?’

Daisy: Did you work actively in any way to prove to people that it wasn’t an Asian problem, it was just the problem of one individual or a couple of individuals?

Fiona: Um, I never had to prove that to anyone. Because nobody like—‘Oh my gosh, you Asian....we hate you!’ Nope, I never had that.

Although Fiona, members of her Fellowship, and her friends were concerned about the reputation of their racial group following the crimes, she says she did not experience backlash from the community. She states that she “never had to prove” herself to anyone, due to the connection between her racial group and the race of the perpetrators. So, while Fiona speculated about problems for members of her group stemming from the crimes, she did not experience backlash related to her race and/or the crimes.

Another respondent, Felicia, explained that the fact the perpetrator of the 4/16 massacre was Korean American was not considered a “big deal” on campus:

Felicia: [What I heard about 4/16] was just news about how a Korean American—psychologically, you know like, he wasn’t well, so, um, like honestly it didn’t really like, occur to me like, that him being Korean was a big deal—and I don’t think other students

on campus—considered it, like, a big deal...I don't think it was a huge deal, just like brushed it off that it was a student that wasn't well—and that was the problem.

Conversely, Mason states that he *did* face backlash related to 4/16; however, he did not experience it from members of the Virginia Tech community. He suggests that if one were to link race to the crime in the Virginia Tech community, one would be regarded as a “terrible person”:

Daisy: And, did you hear of—did you notice any repercussions from that [4/16] simply because—

Mason: Yeah, actually. Especially because I was in NOVA at the time, there were a lot of just reactionary, like um, you know people—I don't know if you heard, there were a lot of crazy stories up there, just like, you know, people took like rocks and just threw 'em through windows, just 'cause they're Korean—

Daisy: Korean peoples' houses?

Mason: No, Korean stores, 'cause like in Annandale, there's some, there's actually like a block of Annandale, uh, near downtown, with just like a lot of uh, Korean stores, you know, restaurants, what not—people call it “K-Town.” It's just like a Little Korea in Annandale. But not just there, like in Centreville, too. I just heard about like, you know, people, like destroying windows and what not, maybe like exacting revenge on somebody.

Daisy: Did you hear of anything like that taking place on campus?

Mason: No, I never heard of anything like that here. I wanna' say that, it's got a lot to do with the like atmosphere here, it's just like after that, almost immediately right after that, people made it a point to say, you know, we understand it's not because he's Korean that this happened, and to do anything in reaction to him being Asian was just like...unacceptable. Like, you could feel like that was the attitude here. It was like, well

yeah, he was Korean, but if you say, if you do anything just because he was Korean, that's terrible, you're a terrible person.

Along similar lines, Kaiser Tang, a male Chinese American senior [interviewed spring 2010], characterizes April 16th as a test—one which Virginia Tech and the surrounding community passed with flying colors. Notably, Kaiser was a student at Virginia Tech *before* and *after* the events of April 16th:

Daisy: What do you think the community's perception of Asian Americans is, is it positive, negative, and do you think it's changed over the last four years?

Kaiser: Um, well. I think a big TEST of that, um, was the shooting, and um, when I found out about that, that the shooter was Asian—at first, there was a rumor that the shooter was Chinese, and I just let out a huge sigh, like—not of relief. I thought, oh my goodness, now everyone's going to be like [switches into a Southern accent], 'Ohh, Chineese people are weird...' But, the thing is like, most people here, the surrounding area is all Southern, and with that comes all that typical prejudice, you know, of white America, so, I was afraid that things were going to be different—and they HAVEN'T. So, I would say in the past four years, nothing's changed that much in terms of general opinion. And I think that people, you know, Tech students, in general, are very warm, and I think they're very welcoming....I'm never around people that would discriminate, so maybe asking me is not a good, you know, resource, because I've never met the kind of people that would make those kinds of jokes—I mean, everyone knows the typical Asian stereotypes: 'Oh, help me fix my printer!' and all those kinds of things, but they're all said in fun it's not like, they're very P.C., I've never really experienced discrimination—

Daisy: At Tech?

Kaiser: Anywhere.

Kaiser acknowledges he found the initial news that the shooter was Asian American daunting, but goes on to turn this memory into a “water into wine” tale. He argues that the community's

lack of backlash toward the Asian American community is testament to the fact that racial prejudices may be a thing of the past.

In this segment, Kaiser makes an additional statement that is noteworthy: “I’m never around people that would discriminate...” Kaiser claims that he is never around people who discriminate; in fact, he claims he has never experienced discrimination more generally. Similar to other respondents, Kaiser links race and humor, thereby normalizing race-based jokes: those of which he *has* heard, he treats as though they are benign; he characterizes the race-based jokes he has heard as “very P.C.”

Another member of my sample, Genji, reminisced about April 16th and the community’s reaction to the events of that day. Similar to other respondents, Genji acknowledges that he was slightly nervous because the perpetrator was Asian, but his fears quickly passed:

Genji: Oh, yeah—and, like 4/16....I was here for that.

Daisy: Did you notice—before that and after that—a change in people’s attitudes?

Genji: Ohhhh, uh, actually, I was little scared when that thing happened because, I’m afraid that people are going to like stereotype Asians—like ‘Asian, oh you bad, you crazy’ and so but, in this community, we, like, I think there’s nothing like that. So, but my friend, who’s Korean, and they have the, the Korean high school in NOVA, he got beat up because the shooter was Korean, so in other places, but in here I feel like nothing serious, we grew [grown] up, college kids. The other thing, though, you know, it’s one people who caused this, it’s not like the whole race, the group—nothing like that. I feel like we’re all Hokies, we’re like family, one family. I never felt like ‘Oh, Genji, you Asian, you crazy.’ No. I mean, I was a little scared, like, right after that happened, but, I mean, in the end, nothing, no, no, no—no, no, I never got any negative, like, feedback.

Genji depicts members of the Virginia Tech community as a family. He suggests that there is something unique about Virginia Tech—people are regarded as “Hokies” above all else. He also states that members of the community are too mature to lash out at Asian Americans in response to April 16th— “... we grew up [we’re grown up], college kids.” It may be something that people in other areas do, or people of less maturity, but not college students, and certainly not Hokies. Another one of Genji’s statements that is significant: “...I never felt like ‘Oh, Genji, you Asian, you crazy’” In making this statement, Genji suggests the possibility that his identity is in part a reflection of the community’s perception of him—his very own “looking-glass self” (Cooley 1902/1909). Because he did not feel an attitude shift on the part of his community, he did not believe the events of April 16th had an impact on his sense of self or identity.

With regards to the mass shooting, respondent Sam reflects that he heard concerns from members of his social group, speculating that times might be tough for Asian Americans at Virginia Tech following 4/16. Although he was away from the University when the massacre occurred, he was in touch with friends on campus, and he returned to campus a short while later. Similar to Genji, Sam suggests that college students are too mature to launch race-based discrimination towards members of the Asian American community on campus, and similar to Kaiser and Mason, he states that he has never faced racial discrimination in general:

Daisy: So, in terms of...when you were thinking about Virginia Tech as it relates to race, what thoughts did you have before you came here? Did you have concerns? Did it have a reputation for you?

Sam: People were saying it was gonna be bad for Asians, especially the April 16th, like, that was the year I missed—

Daisy: That was the year you would have been here but—

Sam: Yeah, exactly. So, so after I came back, they were saying, well for Asians it might be, something might come up but nothing ever did and I feel like nobody ever brought, like everybody was, nobody saw it socially, like racially, that attack or anything.

Daisy: Okay. So who was saying, ‘Oh, it might be bad for Asians’?

Sam: No like one of my friends he was like, ‘Yeah, Asians might have a hard time here for a while.’ Or something. I just remember him saying something, talking about it.

Daisy: Was he at Tech or—

Sam: Yeah, he was at Tech. He was the roommate that eventually moved in later on, the Cambodian guy. I was like, ‘Oh, alright, I can see that a little bit.’ People are pretty mature now. I mean, it’s college. People really won’t like, see it as like, an attack on race or anything from a race, or attack a race because of some kid that was kinda’ like not mentally stable. It’s not really because he hated other races or anything.

Daisy: Okay.

Sam: So it was, nothing really happened racially.

Daisy: Okay. So you never experienced anything?

Sam: Yeah, actually, I don’t think I’ve ever really experienced racial like discrimination-wise, not really ever.

Similarly, Josie acknowledges that after the events of 4/16, Asian Americans’ reputations were in question. However, she characterizes derogatory comments aimed at Asian Americans as “casual” and said in humor:

Daisy: Okay, and what did you hear [concerning 4/16 and race]?

Josie: Well, it’s just like Asian Americans didn’t really have a good reputation after that...and like...

Daisy: Were people saying they *weren't going to*, or that they *don't*, or that they *didn't*—?

Josie: It was kinda' like casually...saying that. Kinda' as a joke, too—it wasn't very serious or anything.

Daisy: And how do you think it is today—do you think relations are fine, or was there some truth to that joke?

Josie: I think that relationships are fine.

In this segment, Josie notes that there was speculation that the reputation of Asian Americans at Virginia Tech would be tarnished; however, she notes that while jokes may have been made, nothing serious came of it, and relationships between Asian Americans and the campus community are “fine.” Race-related humor in connection with the crimes is also raised by Kathy, who says while jokes were made, the ones she heard emanated from other Asian American students:

Daisy: Have you heard people say ‘Oh I’m not coming to Tech because of those reasons [the crimes]’?

Kathy: I’ve heard people say just like, jokingly, you know, like ‘I don’t want to get shot’ or whatever, like in a joking manner. Or, people at other colleges [when asked to visit], kind of jokingly say ‘I don’t wanna’ get shot!’ that sort of thing...

Daisy: Okay, and are those Asian American students [making the jokes]?

Kathy: Yes.

And, Fiona also acknowledges that jokes have been made, yet insists such jokes are not a problem, because these jokes were made by members of her friendship network; therefore, she did not take offense:

Fiona: My friends would, like, joke sometimes [following 4/16]. Inappropriate jokes about that.

Daisy: Your white friends?

Fiona: Yeah.

Daisy: What kind of jokes do you remember?

Fiona: Oh, like ‘Oh, don’t make her angry!’ [laughs]

Daisy: ‘She might go crazy’ or something like that?

Fiona: Yeah, but it was just like...we were friends, so I didn’t take it too offensive.

Humor is also raised in relation to the mass shooting by Orion So, a male Korean American sophomore [interviewed fall 2010]. In a revealing exchange, Orion provides the perspectives of Korean nationals, his parents, his friends, and his own handling of the incident:

Daisy: ...As a Korean, what did you hear, what conversations went on concerning [4/16]?

Orion: Well, among Koreans like, who’s this dumbass who did this? Um, why would he do this so like, Koreans would have a bad reputation. And stuff like that. And then some people were kind of, my parents were very, um, kind of, uh, they felt sorry for the parents.

Daisy: I’m sure.

Orion: Like, you know, his parents raised him, and came here for a better opportunity for him, and that happened, you know, but um, stuff like that. And then I was in California, and I was telling my friends where I was going to college, and being the only Korean they know, they were like, ‘Oh my God, I can’t believe you’re going there...’ ...even my friends’ parents were like, ‘Oh yeah, uh...you’re going to Virginia Tech, right...’

Daisy: So friends, like white kids, even parents?

Orion: Yeah, yeah.

Daisy: And what did you say, what was your response?

Orion: I mean, it was kind of a joke. And, I mean, I knew, I was trying to stay away from guns and stuff [laughing]...

Daisy: And making YouTube videos of yourself threatening the University [laughing]....so when you got here, did anyone say anything to you trying to connect you [with 4/16]?

Orion: And I think that's what's so amazing about Virginia Tech actually. 'Cause, actually, there is no discrimination against Koreans because even that happened, and um...

Daisy: I'm sorry, what did you say? There's no discrimination against Koreans...even after that happened?

Orion: Even if...yeah, even after that happened.

Daisy: Okay, so you haven't heard stories from friends about...

Orion: ...I've heard from [Koreans] who were here during that incident...they told me what happened, how it happened, because, I don't even really know what happened actually...I know how many people died, but that's it.

Daisy: ...So as a high school student, it wasn't something...

Orion: Yeah, it didn't really struck me that...hard. Um, yeah, I was treating it like it was none of my business. I guess. Um, and then I joked around with it. I know it's bad, but I told my friends, if you bother me, I'm gonna' shoot you. Jokes. But...and then I was doing the April 11? April 16th run, um, and then I saw how many people were there and even after this, I don't know, it's been...four years?

Daisy: Yeah, I think four years.

Orion: And, yeah, even after four years, how many people were still there, and running this thing, for those people, and, it's, it was just like, a really, amazing experience. For me, 'cause, like, maybe this is what Virginia Tech is all about.

In the above segment, Orion indicates that 4/16 did not impact his decision to attend Virginia Tech. Moreover, he made jokes concerning the events of 4/16. Once he was a student at Tech, he witnessed the annual run memorializing the victims who died in the massacre: he communicates that he is truly moved by the support he witnessed at that event, and ends the segment by saying “maybe this is what Virginia Tech is all about”: a supportive community where one witnesses amazing experiences manifesting from support, unity, community.

On a related note, we hear again from Kathy, who stated that 4/16 *positively* impacted her decision to attend Virginia Tech. In the following segment, she highlights the strength and unity she believes exists at Virginia Tech, while at the same time acknowledging that Chinese Americans were relieved that the perpetrator of 4/16 was Korean American, not Chinese American:

Daisy: ...How did it [4/16], if in any way, factor into your decision to come to Tech?

Kathy: Yes, it [4/16] did—and in a good way—because, I just loved the communication and the sense of unity that this event brought to the campus, and in this community and anything negative, I think it's mostly the Korean Americans that suffered it. I think that people were pretty, um, specific, in pointing fingers and stuff. And so I think the Chinese com—the Chinese American community probably felt really relieved in a way—that it wasn't, you know—and I don't think anything negative towards me and my race specifically.

Daisy: Okay—and what did you hear in terms of accounts from Koreans and Korean American students, any negative things that you saw or heard about happening?

Kathy: I mean, basically um, just stereotyping, you know, and um, just, just you know. I mean it could happen anywhere, on any campus—but it's like, 'Oh you know,' if people making jokes about 'I'm gonna' do this or that,' it's like—I don't know—April 16th—I don't know, I don't usually like to participate or care too much about those conversations, so.

Kathy begins by explaining that 4/16 positively impacted her decision to attend Virginia Tech. While she acknowledges that race-based jokes have been made in the aftermath of 4/16, and she speculates that Korean Americans may have had more negative experiences than her own racial group, she ends the discussion by stating that she doesn't like to "participate or care too much about those conversations." She trusts in Virginia Tech, largely due to the University's response to tragic events—she characterizes the University's response as "a great job...helping the community heal." It is this trust that attracted her to study at the University in the first place.

Mitch encompasses many of the above themes in his discussion of 4/16 and race on campus. Similar to other respondents, Mitch acknowledges that he had concerns related to the connection between the race of the perpetrator and the Asian American community on campus. However, he then moves on to discuss stereotypes, and diminishes their significance by saying they are "just for fun":

Daisy: So, when you first heard about 4/16 for example, what were some of the things that ran through your mind?

Mitch: Ummm...I was like, oh I feel so bad for like, all of the students that died, and then I feel like, this could be like a huge stereotype towards the Asian community because of the shooter was Asian. And then the thing is, shootings happen all the time, and I'm like, but they're still going to make a stereotype out of this because of, they're making such a huge incident out of it.

Daisy: Right, it was global.

Mitch: Exactly. And that's what makes it that much more of an impact towards the Asian community rather than like, a regular shooting, like day by day.

Daisy: Okay.

Mitch: And, then, I felt that, I felt that, people may like, not apply to Tech because of that, but like, I still want to apply there anyways, regardless. Because I still wanna' go there and I still, like even though, there might be stereotypes, I really don't care, 'cause I am who I am, there's nothing you can do about it.

Daisy: Okay. And what have you found in terms of the way people have regarded you while you're here? Were those stereotypes, were they true? I mean, did people treat you differently, or were they unfounded?

Mitch: I mean, stereotypes, it's more of who says the stereotypes because there can be friends that say stereotypes to each other, just to, for fun. And then there's people who say it to each other as a mean comment or just to pick a fight. Most of the friends I hang out with, we just say stereotype jokes and everything, just 'cause, we make fun of each other just for fun.

Daisy: Like what kind of jokes? Can you think of any?

Mitch: Like, there's like racial slurs, like 'Asians have like thin eyes' or like my, black friend how black people eat KFC all the time, and we just laugh at each other, and we just say things back and forth most of the time, and generally just make fun of each other, or ourselves sometimes, too.

Daisy: Okay, so in terms of [your concern] that people would stereotype or that there would be negative attitudes towards Asians at Tech: have you found that?

Mitch: Um, no I haven't.

Daisy: Okay, okay. So being Asian American hasn't had a negative impact on you while you're here?

Mitch: No it has not.

Daisy: And overall, would you say the Tech community is warm and welcoming?

Mitch: Yes, it is very warm and welcoming.

Daisy: Okay, and what about the greater community, the town?

Mitch: Um, I'd say when I go into town to eat and everything, the people I meet there are really nice, they're really friendly, they're open, they're willing to talk to you...

Although Mitch was initially concerned that 4/16 would have lingering negative effects for the Asian American community at Virginia Tech, his concerns were unfounded. He characterizes the community as “very warm and welcoming.” Mitch offers support for the recurring sentiment among my respondents that stereotypes are acceptable when paired with humor.

Another respondent, Ronald, speaks about both 4/16 and the GLC Incident—incidences which he says are less about culture (or race) and more about individual psychological abnormalities, a point several other respondents noted. In the following segment, Ronald states that he has not faced hostility from the campus community tied to either 4/16 or the GLC Incident:

Daisy: So, we've talked about some of the stereotypes...in terms of the “model minority”...we talked about this in terms of elementary and high school...is this something that—is this a conversation you have even to this day with your friends? Is it something that preoccupies you, or is it something that, once again, you just laugh it off and it's not a big deal to you?

Ronald: Yeah, not a big deal...and since 4/16, I wasn't here, but...

Daisy: So, since 4/16—I know you weren't here, but what did you think when you heard of it? And, did that factor into your decision to come here?

Ronald: Well, the—the shooter was actually Korean American, so...within the community, I mean, as far as I heard, every Korean American that I heard from was disappointed, and um, we definitely thought it would taint our image, just because...nobody wanted it to happen...and, it just happened...the person just happened to be Korean American...it had nothing to do with the culture. And, we didn't wanna'...receive any heat for that. But, when I actually came to Tech, I thought that people were generally understanding...surprisingly understanding...and uh, definitely knew that culture had nothing to do with it. And, I mean, maybe it wasn't outward...outwardly expressed to me, but, but it was a nice surprise when...to have everyone that I ran across not mention it, and brush it off as an isolated incident.

Daisy: Okay. And, so you haven't had any...I don't wanna' use the term 'backlash'...but things such as name-calling associated with that, or people acting differently around you simply because of that event?

Ronald: Not really. No.

Daisy: And, then the next year, in the GLC there was the event—you're familiar with that?

Ronald: Yeah.

Daisy: Some people have never heard of it. What did you see, or what did you hear? What were your conversations with friends like about that? Did you have conversations about it? What came out of it, if anything?

Ronald: Uh...I mean, it was a tragedy, let's see....there wasn't too much discussion within our group...about whether that had anything to do with that guy being—Chinese, I think? Um...uh...[laughs]. We were just hoping that another incident didn't happen that involved another Asian American...because, we thought that that would put a doubt into other people's minds...

Daisy: That a pattern was established?

Ronald: Yeah....we didn't really talk into it, other than the guy was not of the right mind.

Daisy: And is that what you would say about the 4/16 guy, too? That is was just an isolated event? It had nothing to do with him being Korean, it was just in his mind, or? Or, were there things at Virginia Tech that led to the event, or...how did you'll make sense of it?

Ronald: I mean, I do know a little more about it than most people do, just because...he lived in my friend's neighborhood, and um, the high school he went to—a lot of my friends went to, it was a neighboring high school...so, I did know a few things about him. I don't think it had anything to do with whether he was Korean or not, just because—his older sister was extremely successful, she went to Harvard or something...she just ended up well-off. I just think it was—just something that he might have been born with, just because...he was never what everybody would consider normal. He never talked to people...he, when he did talk to them he would say really weird things...just strange in general. Umm...so in the end, I'm not sure if it had anything to do with his culture or his upbringing.

Daisy: Do you think it had anything to do with being at Tech?

Ronald: Oh, right...um...[long pause]...I don't know much about his background, but...I'd have to doubt it.

Based on his knowledge of the perpetrator's history (this knowledge coming from friends who had attended the same high school as the perpetrator), Ronald explains 4/16 as an isolated incident involving a mentally unstable individual. Similarly, he believes the perpetrator in the GLC Incident was mentally unstable, and that his mental state was the reason he committed the crime. He denies that culture (or race) has any connection to the crimes; instead, he sees both crimes as isolated incidents perpetrated by troubled individuals.

Overall, my respondents' discussions of their experiences at Virginia Tech did not reflect a strong interest in, or concern with, April 16th. Three of 18 respondents did not mention April 16th in the course of their interview; at no point did the massacre become a central topic of discussion in interviews with the remaining 15 respondents. Instead of speaking of April 16th in negative terms, respondents used the aftermath of April 16th as evidence that the Virginia Tech community is "one of a kind"—even in the face of tragedy, respondents perceived and experienced Virginia Tech as a supportive and inclusive environment. Several respondents stated that April 16th had a positive impact on their decision to attend Virginia Tech. These themes—a general lack of interest in 4/16, a positive association between 4/16 and the University—were consistent: I did not find differences in discussions of April 16th along the lines of gender, ethnicity, class standing, or major.

D. The Graduate Life Center Incident

While the Graduate Life Center (GLC) Incident occurred almost two years after April 16th, the events of April 16th were still fresh on the minds of many at Virginia Tech at the time. However, these two events were handled by the University in starkly different ways, and were consequently given differing amounts of media coverage. While the University used April 16th to launch a rebranding campaign of Virginia Tech, the GLC Incident was swept under the rug. Outside of Southwestern Virginia, knowledge of the beheading is scant to nonexistent.

In most cases, after respondents spoke about April 16th, they followed with a few words about the incident in the GLC. If and when respondents did not raise the issue of the GLC Incident, I first asked if they were aware of it [due to very light media coverage, one would occasionally come across students, faculty, and staff who had missed news of this event]. All

respondents knew of it, but they had even less to say about the incident than they did about April 16th. Once I established that they knew of the GLC Incident, I asked *what* they knew of it, and if anything race-related had stemmed from the incident. The following from Duncan is representative of my respondents' discussions of this incident:

Daisy: What about after the GLC Incident? Do you recall that?

Duncan: Aw, yeah, the GLC Incident.

Daisy: Do you recall any [racial] backlash after that?

Duncan: Um, no, not terribly, but it's just like, again, within ourselves, we're like a little concerned, it's like uh-oh, this might look bad or something, and like, uhhh, yeah.

Similar to his discussion of April 16th, Duncan acknowledges initial concern about the incident. However, he goes on to explain this was a passing concern, and that nothing negative has come from the incident.

Along the same lines, Fiona notes that when she first heard news of the crime, word on the street was that the perpetrator might be a member of her racial group, which caused her distress. However, she is clear to state that she did not experience long-lasting distress, or maltreatment, tied to the GLC Incident:

Fiona: ...They were like, 'It might be a Korean person again!' I'm like, 'Oh my gosh, please let it not be a Korean person.'

Daisy: Okay.

Fiona: And then, like, it was just like, I was never targeted because of those two incidents at Virginia Tech.

When I asked Kaiser about the GLC Incident, I received a similar response. He focuses on the isolated nature of the crime, and compares it to the recent murder of a Caucasian lacrosse player at UVA by her estranged boyfriend:

Daisy: Okay, so we've talked about 4/16, what about after the GLC Incident?

Kaiser: That was just some, craaaazy, that was a very isolated incident in that he, murdered, her—just like happened at UVA, he murdered her—happened at UVA, happened here, different people, one white, one Asian.

Daisy: So, did you and your friends discuss these incidents after they happened? Did you hear complaints from your friends or anything like that?

Kaiser: Never discussed that particular incident [the GLC Incident]....

Overall, my respondents framed the GLC Incident as an isolated incident. Of those who speculated about it, they attributed it to personal problems on part of the perpetrator, perhaps linked to an undiagnosed mental illness. The framing of the incident mirrors the (very thin) coverage of it by the media: isolated incident, unrelated to the University, perhaps the work of a mad man.

Members of my sample claimed that the GLC Incident was not broadly discussed within the Asian American community at Virginia Tech. The topic was not of particular interest or concern to this community. According to Orion, the GLC Incident had no impact on him:

Daisy: Okay, and then, this thing happened in the GLC, you were here for that?

Orion: GLC? The Chinese?

Daisy: Yes.

Orion: I heard of it, that was the year before me.

Daisy: That was the year before you? Okay, so, what did you, what conversations did you hear about it?

Orion: I've heard, that Chinese guy pulled out like Chinese cooking knife and chopped off a Chinese girl's head... Yeah, and in AVP, I mean ABP [Au Bon Pain], and this lady who was working there was so traumatized no one saw her again after that day. She never came back to work. Stuff like that... I don't know that much about that one.

Daisy: Okay, okay, but that [incident] didn't have any impact on you?

Orion: Uh uh. No.

Orion's words are representative of my respondents': he knew very little about the GLC Incident, he was not particularly concerned about it, and he had not been impacted by it in any way. In his discussion, Orion focuses on a dramatic story-line concerning an employee who has never been seen again, rather than the race/ethnicity of the perpetrator or the reputation of the Asian American community at Virginia Tech.

Another respondent who focused on the dramatic nature of the crime, rather than the race of the perpetrator, was Josie. She notes that simply entering the GLC is scary, given her knowledge of the crime that took place there:

Daisy: Do you recall what things you said to your friends or what things you had heard [about the GLC Incident]?

Josie: Well, I mean, when I went into the GLC sometimes, like we would say well this happened here, and how scary it must have been....yeah, that's about it.

Daisy: But there wasn't any concern on your part because of another Asian connection?

Josie: It wasn't—yeah, it wasn't very racial, just how scary it was.

None of my respondents reported significant discussions about the incident; although all respondents were aware of the incident, they exhibited very little knowledge of or interest in the case. Interestingly, a number of respondents could not even remember the location where the beheading took place, variously referring to the location as “the bookstore” instead of the GLC, “AVP” instead of APB, and so forth.

In terms of the official University response to the criminal events, several respondents noted that President Steger’s [2009] open letter to the community—while having the best of intentions—called attention to the race of the perpetrators of both crimes. Take, for example, the following from Felicia:

Felicia: And actually, ha—my other friends, um, in an email that they sent out after the bookstore, President Steger—you know he mentioned that—this has nothing to do—you know affiliated with ethnicities or like races—and obviously this means Asian American [laughter], but you know my other friends were like—why did he have to say something like that—because that just like points us out, if you think about it...

Daisy: Yeah, the wording...

Felicia: The word in a way, it kind of just points it out, because, you know, they were international students—they were Chinese—and then the 4/16—‘cause they were all Asians—it just makes it look like Asians have a very violent nature.

Daisy: ‘Cause it’s essentially linking the two for the community—

Felicia: It was kind of—it was kind of linking it. Yeah. But I don’t think it was intentionally, I think he was more trying to help out by saying you know....

Daisy: Cut it out?

Felicia: Yeah, cut it out—like, Asians don’t have anything to do with this, you shouldn’t like target, but at the same time when he did say that, it kind of made it more, a little

more obvious—but I still thought it was pretty funny. Some of my friends were like—we were joking around—we were like, ‘Why did he do that!’ [laughter] But, it wasn’t a big deal.

In the above segment, Felicia questions the wording of President Steger’s letter; although she believes he meant well, she worries that he made the race of the perpetrators more salient for the community. However, she characterizes this fact as “pretty funny” and concludes that the fallout from the letter “wasn’t a big deal.”

Jackson Sa, a male Korean American sophomore [interviewed fall 2010] characterizes the GLC Incident as “creepy, very creepy” and states he did wonder about Virginia Tech’s reputation after learning about this crime. However, knowledge of this crime and 4/16 did not stop him from attending Virginia Tech—as he puts it, he was not “too worried” about adjusting to life at Virginia Tech as an Asian American:

Daisy: Do you know about the GLC thing that happened?

Jackson: Yeah, the Chinese student.

Daisy: The decapitation, yeah. So, how did you hear about that, and what was your reaction?

Jackson: That one...

Daisy: You weren’t here then either—

Jackson: I wasn’t here. After I got accepted to Virginia Tech, I was like ‘Oh, yay!’ and I started Googling Virginia Tech, and then I saw this news article.

Daisy: Not what you want to come across, right?

Jackson: Yeah, so I read it: pretty creepy. Very creepy. After reading that I kind of began to have second thoughts, like maybe Virginia Tech is not very friendly to Asians—like maybe it has a bad rep or something.

Daisy: Okay. And did that really seriously enter your mind?

Jackson: That was in my mind, but it was nothing too serious to the point that I didn't want to come here. Like, wherever I go, I always find a way to somehow like it and appreciate it.

Daisy: Adjust to it?

Jackson: Yeah, adjust to it. And, I wasn't too worried about adjusting to Virginia Tech...I was just, 'Oh, it will be fine.'

Finally, when I asked Genji about the GLC Incident, he admits to having initial concerns, but similar to the above respondents, these concerns were not warranted. He ends the conversation by asserting that the perpetrator of the GLC Incident “had nothing to do with me”:

Daisy: What about, do you remember what happened in the GLC?

Genji: Oh, yeah yeah yeah. I think that, we were having a meeting at Squires, like in here, it happened like right there, yeah, we have a meeting, and then, I think police came in, and knocked on the door, like, 'Hey, don't go out.' So, something had happened. So then, I realized that the accident had happened. I was a little worried, 'cause they're Chinese. But in the end, nothing happened, no, nothing negative happened.

Daisy: So, a lot of people said that was just an isolated incident, he was a graduate student—

Genji: Yeah. An international student. He had nothing to do with me, yeah....

Overall, my respondents were not concerned or knowledgeable about the GLC Incident. They did not experience any form of backlash connected to the crime. While several respondents remember having concerns related to the race of the perpetrator of the beheading, these concerns

were ultimately unfounded. Similar to my respondents' discussions of 4/16, I did not find differences in discussions of the GLC Incident along the lines of gender, ethnicity, class standing, or major.

E. Summary of Findings from In-Depth Interviews

In Chapter 1, I stated several directional hypotheses concerning Asian Americans undergraduates' experiences at Virginia Tech: I hypothesized that as a group, they would experience patterns of prejudice and/or discrimination associated with their race/ethnicity on campus. I also expected that they would report stress and tension stemming from their "model minority" status while at Virginia Tech. In addition, I expected Asian American undergraduates at Virginia Tech would report that in general, the University hosts an uncomfortable, and at times hostile, campus climate, especially related to the events of April 16th and the GLC incident. Finally, I expected that they would be in favor of campus initiatives aimed at increasing diversity and inclusion in various forms on campus. Based on the findings from my interview respondents, support was not found for directional hypotheses H1, H2, H3, or H5; modest support was found for directional hypothesis H4: That Asian American undergraduates at Virginia Tech would favor diversity initiatives. One respondent explicitly said she wished Virginia Tech was more diverse; several other respondents were involved in diversity-related activities on campus. Table 13 expresses the percentage of respondents' support for my directional hypotheses.

Table 13: Percentage of Respondents’ Support for Central Directional Hypotheses

Hypothesis	Support	Do Not Support
H1. Asian American undergraduates at Virginia Tech will report experiencing patterns of prejudice and/or discrimination associated with their race/ethnicity on campus.	0% (n=0)	100% (n=18)
H2. Asian American undergraduates at Virginia Tech will report stress and tension stemming from their “model minority” status while at Virginia Tech.	0% (n=0)	100% (n=18)
H3. Asian American undergraduates at Virginia Tech will report that in general, Virginia Tech hosts an uncomfortable, and at time hostile, campus climate.	0% (n=0)	100% (n=18)
H4. Asian American undergraduates at Virginia Tech will be in favor of campus initiatives that strive to increase diversity and inclusion in various forms on campus.	16% (n=3)	84% (n=15)
H5. Asian American undergraduates will report being subjected to hostility related to the events of 4/16/2007 and/or 1/21/2009.	0% (n=0)	100% (n=18)

Finally, a question I commonly asked respondents at the close of the interview was “Would you recommend Virginia Tech to someone similar to yourself?” Of the 12 respondents to whom I posed this question, 100% responded “Yes” without hesitation. Sometimes, respondents would add to this a comment concerning their major (for example, Psychology) and the school’s respective department, such as “I would totally recommend Tech, unless they’re gonna major in Psychology...I wish I’d gone to a school with a higher-ranked Psychology department.” However, in none of these comments was race mentioned—respondents

customarily ended the interview with a positive, reaffirming statement concerning Virginia Tech and a nod towards the positive campus climate they had experienced.

For example, when I posed this question to Hen, he focused on the importance of selecting a good major:

Hen: Well, I would say that Virginia Tech is a great school. It depends on your major a lot. You have to really like it. I switched to accounting because I was looking for job security. It's really not my favorite topic and I actually added finance and management in order to have a backup sort of thing in case I end up doing accounting and really hate it. One of the best things to do is make sure you really like what you're doing. In your first year, take a variety of classes and see what things appeal to you. Pretty much have fun and try hard as well. School comes first.

When I asked Josie if she would recommend Virginia Tech to someone like herself, she states she would "definitely" recommend Virginia Tech, which she characterizes as "safe" and a "tight [knit] community":

Daisy: Okay, to wrap things up...if somebody similar to yourself but younger were to say "I'm thinking about colleges..." what would you tell them, generally speaking, about Virginia Tech? Would you suggest they come here, and so forth?

Josie: Definitely. I mean, I don't know about other colleges or how they compare, but, I feel like the campus is really safe, and since it's so small, everything is together, you don't have to walk as far to go places and it is a tight community. So...like it's safer than one in the city where there's a lot of traffic and just like random stuff going on.

Similarly, Felicia speaks highly of Virginia Tech and the surrounding community when I pose the question to her:

Daisy: If a friend [similar to yourself] asked if you would recommend Tech....what would you say?

Felicia: Um, go for it—it's a great school. Like, the people are friendly, you'll learn a lot being away from home, especially here like it's a great environment, to you know, learn, grow a bit, you know?

Daisy: And have you found the surrounding environment to be...as hospitable?

Felicia: Yes.

Daisy: Like, the town of Blacksburg and Montgomery County?

Felicia: Yeah, it's definitely been—everybody's so nice—like I said, some people are so polite and friendly, so it definitely is nice.

And, Trudy, who was initially unenthusiastic about attending Virginia Tech because it wasn't, in her eyes or her parents,' "top tier," has come around: "Tech has been so good to me. I came in with that initial fear...it was my last option, not a top choice. It has been so good to me. I love the mountains now. It is so beautiful here."

CHAPTER 5: Findings from Content Analysis of Desktop Graffiti

The multidimensional nature of this project allows me to gauge the presence of, or lack thereof, hostility towards Asian Americans at Virginia Tech prior to, and following, sensational crimes through various measures. A final measure I employ to supplement my in-depth interviews is that of content analysis; specifically, I conducted a longitudinal content analysis of student-authored desktop graffiti at Virginia Tech. I previously analyzed desktop graffiti for my Master's thesis (2004). Although I found very little racist graffiti in that study, all that I did uncover targeted Asian Americans. After the 4/16 massacre, I conducted two additional rounds of graffiti collection in order to ascertain if the content of the graffiti had undergone a transformation. I was interested to see if racist graffiti targeting Asian Americans increased following the shootings. Graffiti collected in 2003 provides us with an initial snapshot of campus climate at Virginia Tech; graffiti collected six months and one year after the massacre serve as snapshots which we can compare to the original.

A. Review of the Literature

For the present study, a longitudinal content analysis of student-authored graffiti on classroom desktops was conducted. The purpose of studying desktop graffiti is to ascertain campus climate via unobtrusive (Webb, et al. 2000) means. Graffiti is a revelatory form of communication (Abel & Buckley 1977); thus, one expects that graffiti on student desktops may reveal information about campus climate.

The practice of graffiti writing is centuries old and can be traced back to the days of Pompeii in ancient Rome (Lindsay 1966; Hojer 2008); such writings were also common practice in Jacobean and Elizabethan England (Hojer 2008). The *Bible*, believed by some to be one of

our most ancient texts, makes reference to graffiti. Specifically, the *Bible* mentions the words of God appearing on the walls (Hojer 2008) in *Daniel 5:5*:

The Handwriting on the Wall

Immediately the fingers of a man's hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace, opposite the lampstand; and the king saw the hand as it wrote. Then the king's color changed, and his thoughts alarmed him; his limbs gave way, and his knees knocked together. The king cried aloud to bring in the enchanters, the Chalde'ans, and the astrologers. The king said to the wise men of Babylon, 'Whoever reads this writing, and shows me its interpretation, shall be clothed with purple, and have a chain of gold about his neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom.'

Thus, we see that both the practice, and the significance, of graffiti has been around for centuries.

As I noted in my Master's thesis [see Ball (2004)], when it comes to the *study* of graffiti, graffiti has long been the focus of social scientific endeavors [see, for example, Read (1935), Reisner (1974)]. Graffiti allows for unabashed self-expression; graffiti affords one the ability to comment on topics too sensitive for public discourse (Gonos, et al. 1976). Graffiti may also reveal valuable information about social deviance: "The analysis of graffiti could provide vital information for investigations of the breakdown of discipline and order, or into the workings of the moronic or ego-starved or bored mind" (Reisner 1974: 8).

Although graffiti has been of interest to scholars for decades, it is now considered a full-fledged and just topic for academic exploration. As Michael DeNotto (2014) states:

Graffiti is now recognized as a legitimate source of academic study, and it is being studied as a reaction to injustice and disenfranchisement, a cry for revolution, a way to create awareness of sociopolitical issues, an expression of hope for the future, an effort to reclaim public spaces, or an attempt to beautify the urban environment...(p.208).

Graffiti is also characterized by some as part of a “youth movement;” the act of graffiti writing is seen as giving youth a voice. Hedegaard (2014) explains that graffiti offers youth of today an outlet through which they can express themselves. Specifically, Hedegaard notes that youth of today may experience tensions stemming from their awkward place in society: youth occupy a strange realm between childhood and adulthood, a realm whose norms are not always clear, and one which presents unique challenges to its occupants. In characterizing graffiti as a “youth activity,” Hedegaard (2014) argues that graffiti affords youth freedom; they are able to express themselves regarding the tensions stemming from their ever-changing role in Western society (p.387-391).

When one hears the term “graffiti” today, the style of graffiti that comes to mind is that which originated in and around New York City in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The foundations of such graffiti are expertly documented by artists and scholars alike: for example, in the 1983 documentary film *Style Wars*, directed by Henry Chalfant and Tony Silver; in Richard Lachmann’s 1988 article “Graffiti as Career and Ideology,” published in the *American Journal of Sociology*; and, by essayist Norman Mailer and photographer Jon Naar in *The Faith of Graffiti* (1974/2009). This style of graffiti involves illegal writing and tagging on exterior surfaces, such as the walls of buildings and subway cars, most often using spray paint. Although the “crisis” of graffiti in New York City that the aforementioned sources documented has subsided, discussions concerning the “art world” (Becker 1982) of graffiti continue. Central topics of debate on this subject include a continued discussion of graffiti as crime vs. graffiti as

art; the commodification of the form; and, the need for protection of graffiti writing under copyright law. Given that graffiti is currently one of the fastest-growing artistic movements (Lerman 2003), it makes sense that lively conversations about this art form abound.

Graffiti is also expansive in terms of the spaces, both literally and figuratively, it occupies. The rise of the Internet has led to the creation of various databases of images of graffiti and related resources. Whereas in the past, graffiti was ephemeral, and was limited to documentation via photos or films taken by an individual or a handful of individuals, the Internet has made possible numerous websites featuring crowd-sourced archives of graffiti, as well as blogs on the topic (DeNotto 2014). For example, crowd-sourced archives include Art Crimes, a website that originated in 1994 and is still in existence, and was the first website devoted to capturing images of graffiti and making them available online. Fat Cap is a graffiti website that features individual pages devoted to specific writers. And, the International Graffiti Archive showcases only illegal graffiti from around the world, including from 13 countries and 146 cities (DeNotto 2014: 210). Other resources on graffiti include the Cornell Hip Hop Collection, an institutional archive devoted to the topic, considered “the best library collection of street art, graffiti, and hip hop-related physical material” (DeNotto 2014: 210). In addition, several non-profit organizations, focused on public art and graffiti, have been established, including Atlanta’s Living Walls project and Philadelphia’s Mural Arts program (DeNotto 2014).

An important distinction to make in any conversation about graffiti is that between “indoor” and “outdoor” graffiti. Examples of outdoor graffiti include graffiti on the exteriors of buildings and graffiti on subway cars; this is the type of graffiti that comes to mind to the layman when one speaks of “graffiti.” Examples of indoor graffiti include graffiti in the stalls of public restrooms and graffiti on student desktops. While the literature on outdoor graffiti is abundant,

that which focuses specifically on indoor graffiti is limited in comparison. The literature on indoor graffiti is lacking, insofar as most work done on this topic hails from the 1940s and 1950s, and several of the most “recent” accounts were penned in the 80s and early 90s [for example, see Read (1935), Kinsey, et al. (1953), Reisner (1967), Stocker, et al. (1972), Bates & Martin (1980), and Grant (1993)].

More recent accounts on indoor graffiti focus on graffiti found in public restrooms. Although it is important not to equate graffiti found in restrooms with, say, college classrooms, a brief review of the literature on indoor graffiti is in order. Mark A. Krause and Daniel Corts (2002) conducted a cross-cultural study of graffiti writing in the bathrooms of secondary schools and universities in the U.S. and Brazil. They took as their focus the role gender played in terms of amount and content of graffiti written. They report that female Brazilian students at both levels (secondary and university) were more prolific graffiti writers than their American counterparts (Krause & Corts 2002).

Adam Trahan (2011), in “Identity and Ideology: The Dialogic Nature of Latrinalia,” focuses on the graffiti in public restrooms and their relationship to both the nature of the public space, and the larger sociocultural values of the era. Trahan (2011) analyzes the content and character of 323 pieces of graffiti found in 42 men’s restrooms, housed in seven different buildings, on the campus of a Division 1 university located in the Midwest. He reports that the most common theme uncovered is sexuality; this finding is in-line with other studies of indoor graffiti, which have revealed the most common theme to be sex. In his analysis, Trahan (2011) focuses on the “orientation” of sexual messages, classifying them as either “heterosexual” or “homosexual.” He reports that no single ideology dominates; from this, he concludes that “...No particular ideological paradigm is predominant among the graffiti. Rather, the anonymity of the

medium acts to preserve an ongoing ideological debate (on sexuality) where identity is formed and reframed throughout” (p. 1).

In a related pursuit, Lynn Bartholome and Philip Snyder (2004) studied lavatory graffiti as a marker of the subculture found at Dinosaur Bar-B-Que, a nationally-known restaurant in Rochester, NY, featuring live blues, “colorful” patrons, and good barbeque. In their article “Is It Philosophy or Pornography? Graffiti at the Dinosaur Bar-B-Que,” published in *The Journal of American Culture*, the authors explore the nature and amount of graffiti found in the two restrooms available to patrons of the restaurant, a men’s room and a women’s room. Their work resulted in a total of 269 pieces of graffiti analyzed: 140 pieces in the women’s room, and 129 pieces in the men’s room. Similar to Trahan (2011), the authors distinguish between heterosexual and homosexual graffiti; counter to Trahan, they found an abundance of heterosexual graffiti. Overall, sexual graffiti was the most common theme they uncovered; this is a documented trend with regards to indoor graffiti. Notably, the least popular category of graffiti the authors found was that referring to racial/ethnic issues. The environment studied by Bartholome and Snyder (2004) is unique in that patrons at Dinosaur are *encouraged* to write on the walls of the lavatory, i.e. it is somewhat of a spectacle, one of several activities patrons can take part in when visiting this iconic restaurant. Therefore, categorically, it is not identical to indoor graffiti that is considered a form of vandalism and is therefore deviant.

The work of Olofin Olusoji, whose paper “Graffiti as a Tool of Students’ Communication,” published in the *International Review of Social Sciences and Humanities* in 2013, adds to the literature by expanding study location beyond the public restroom: he catalogues graffiti found in a range of spaces in academic settings. In his quantitative analysis of campus-wide graffiti at two universities in southwestern Nigeria, Olusoji (2013) examines and

categorizes (presumably) student-authored graffiti found in lavatories, classrooms, dining halls, and libraries across the two campuses. His work results in an analysis of 152 pieces of graffiti, from which he identifies the most common themes, in order of popularity: “sex and sexual issues,” “institution and staff matters,” “political issues,” “religious issues,” and “other matters” (Olusoji 2013: 3). Similar to studies of lavatory graffiti, the most common theme the author uncovers is sex. This leads Olusoji (2013) to draw the following conclusion: students use the act of graffiti writing to express themselves on issues of controversy and/or concern. While he characterizes the act of graffiti writing as “therapeutic,” he acknowledges it is vandalism, and is therefore a punishable crime. To resolve this, he argues that institutions (in this case, universities) should provide students access to message boards on which students would be able to openly voice their opinions and concerns.

While Olusoji’s (2013) central finding regarding an abundance of sexual graffiti is in-line with earlier studies on indoor graffiti, his work is lacking in terms of its methodological approach. For one, he analyzed just 152 specimens of graffiti; compared to other analyses of graffiti, this sample size is slim [e.g., Ball & Snizek’s (2006) analysis of desktop graffiti considered 1,758 pieces of graffiti; Trahan’s (2011) analysis considered 323 pieces of graffiti; and, Bartholome & Snyder’s (2004) study considered 269 pieces of graffiti]. Olusoji’s (2013) methodological approach is also problematic in that he combines graffiti found in lavatories with that found elsewhere on campus—although he mentions that he studied other locations, such as classrooms, he does not clearly explain how his data were collected and exactly where they were found. There may be significant differences between graffiti found in lavatories at the university, compared to graffiti found in the library at the university, compared to that found in

the dining hall at the university. By collapsing his data into a single category (“university graffiti”), comparisons cannot be made.

In sum, the most common theme of indoor graffiti—both that which is considered vandalism and that which is condoned—is sex. From our review of the literature, we see that a study of graffiti specific to college student desktops (beyond the current study) is not available; most indoor graffiti studies are analyses of restroom graffiti; and, although Olusoji’s (2013) study expanded the study location to include various locations across campus, including classrooms, his work faces significant methodological challenges. Thus, the present study adds to the literature on indoor graffiti, for it explores—specifically—student-authored desktop graffiti.

Based on a review of the literature, and given my interest in the status of Asian Americans at Virginia Tech, I set forth the following hypotheses:

- H1.** Student-authored desktop graffiti at Virginia Tech will reveal themes too sensitive for public discourse, including racist remarks.
- H0.** Student-authored desktop graffiti at Virginia Tech will not reveal themes too sensitive for public discourse, including racist remarks.
- H2.** Student-authored desktop graffiti at Virginia Tech will reveal themes related to social politics and the freedom of expression.
- H0.** Student-authored desktop graffiti at Virginia Tech will not reveal themes related to social politics and the freedom of expression.
- H3.** Sex will be a prominent theme in student-authored desktop graffiti at Virginia Tech.
- H0.** Sex will not be a prominent theme in student-authored desktop graffiti at Virginia Tech.

B. Methodology

For the present study, the first round of graffiti collection took place in 2003. Two buildings of interest on campus were identified (a liberal arts building and an engineering building), and nine classrooms were randomly selected for analysis. Desks in the classrooms were traditionally arranged: at the front of each room was desk or podium intended for the instructor; facing the front of the room, desks were arranged in rows. Classrooms held anywhere from 2 desks to 45 desks. However, most classrooms contained 35-45 desks. Each desk in the nine classrooms was analyzed for amount and content of graffiti.

Four hundred and nineteen desks were analyzed in 2003. Each piece of graffiti uncovered was recorded, resulting in 5,285 total pieces of graffiti. However, many of the 5,285 pieces were unclear and therefore unreadable; they were discarded from the analysis. The remaining 1,758 pieces of graffiti were analyzed and categorized according to theme. Based on my review of the literature on graffiti, I expected to find relevant themes in the graffiti—themes that were reflective of the undergraduate campus climate at Virginia Tech. Following Gonos, et al. (1976), I recognized that I might find graffiti that reflected sentiments too sensitive for public discourse, including derogatory remarks aimed at racial minorities. Related to this, DeNotto (2014) holds that graffiti may include themes related to injustice, disenfranchisement and/or revolution; therefore, I recognized that graffiti of a political nature might appear on the student desktops. And, based on my review of the literature on indoor graffiti, specifically, I expected to find an abundance of sexual graffiti.

Rounds two and three of graffiti collection replicated the methods employed in round one. The second round of data collection, which took place in December of 2007, resulted in 305

desks analyzed. In all, 4,895 individual pieces of graffiti were recorded. After discarding 2,290 instances of unintelligible graffiti, the remaining 2,605 specimens of graffiti were categorized in order to reveal the most common themes.

The third and final round of data collection took place in May of 2008. This resulted in 341 desks analyzed. In all, 5,413 individual pieces of graffiti were recorded. After discarding 2,772 instances of unintelligible graffiti, the remaining 2,641 specimens of graffiti were categorized in order to reveal the most common themes.

C. Findings

In the following paragraphs, I discuss the themes uncovered in my analysis of desktop graffiti by year. I make note of the most popular categories of graffiti, and given the current study's focus on Asian Americans at Virginia Tech, I make note of graffiti referring to racial groups.

2003

The analysis of graffiti from 2003 revealed that the most common themes were: 1) The University, 2) Sex, 3) Greek Life, and 4) Drugs. All graffiti referencing the University was supportive in nature. The popularity of graffiti referencing sex was expected following a review of the literature. While graffiti referring to race was sparse, it did exist; it came in the form of racist remarks against a specific racial group, Asian. Only seven pieces of the 1,758 pieces of categorized graffiti were categorized as "racist." However, each of the seven pieces of racist graffiti targeted Asians: either Vietnamese or Koreans. Some representative examples: "Koreans eat dog," "Go home and fuck yourself, Vietnamese." Relevant to this discussion is that Asian Americans are the largest racial minority group at Virginia Tech. This finding may

suggest that racism tends toward the largest minority group on campus, whomever that may be, rather than the typical black-white dichotomy. Another possibility is that, following DeNotto (2014), racist graffiti relates to feelings of “injustice and disenfranchisement.” Does racist graffiti suggest some underlying sociopolitical issues festering in the campus climate at Virginia Tech? And, if so, is it possible that Asians on campus are seen as a racial threat (Blumer 1958), for they study in large numbers on campus, have a visible presence in the community, and are commonly thought of as high academic achievers?

Following the 4/16 massacre, there exists the possibility that Asian Americans’ status on campus has changed. Related to this, there is the possibility that the content of graffiti has changed with regards to references to Asians and/or Asian Americans. Therefore, the data analysis for rounds two and three of desktop graffiti are focused on most common themes with an eye toward mentions of race—gauging campus climate at Virginia Tech through an analysis of desktop graffiti helps me answer one of my central research questions: does Virginia Tech foster a hostile environment for Asian American undergraduates?

2007

The analysis of graffiti from 2007 revealed that the most common themes were: 1) The University, 2) Greek Life, and 3) Love Messages. Graffiti of a sexual nature was scarce; this runs counter to other studies of indoor graffiti, which reveal sexual graffiti to be a popular theme. Of the 2,605 total pieces of graffiti analyzed, only 43 pieces (1.49%) referred to sex. Five pieces (0.19%) of racist graffiti were uncovered: three which targeted African Americans, one which targeted Asian Americans, and one which targeted Middle Easterners.

An additional category of graffiti was considered during rounds two and three of data collection: 4/16 Solidarity. I wondered if desktops might come to function as memorials to the victims of 4/16, or as outlets for students' frustration concerning 4/16. In 2007, 17 pieces of graffiti were categorized as 4/16 Solidarity (0.65%).

Drugs, while a popular category in the 2003 analysis, were not the focus of much of the graffiti in 2007. Only 36 pieces of graffiti, or 1.38%, referred to drugs.

In sum, the analysis of graffiti produced in 2007, six months after the 4/16 massacre, did not reveal evidence of a hostile campus climate for Asian American undergraduates at Virginia Tech.

2008

The analysis of graffiti from 2008 revealed that the most common themes were: 1) The University, 2) Love Messages, and 3) Greek Life. Once again, graffiti of a sexual nature was scarce. Only 57 pieces, or 2.15%, of the graffiti referred to sex. Racist graffiti was almost non-existent: of the 2,641 pieces of graffiti analyzed, only one piece (0.03%) was racist in nature. This single piece targeted African Americans.

In terms of 4/16 Solidarity, 22 pieces were uncovered (0.83%). And, drugs were once again rarely mentioned: 26 pieces of graffiti, or 0.98%, referred to drugs.

In sum, the analysis of graffiti produced in 2008, one year after the 4/16 massacre, did not reveal evidence of a hostile campus climate for Asian American undergraduates at Virginia Tech.

D. Summary of Key Findings from Content Analysis of Desktop Graffiti

A longitudinal analysis of desktop graffiti, spanning time periods before and after 4/16, reveals a change in both amount and content of graffiti [see Table 14, below, for a comparison of graffiti across the three time periods].

The amount of desktop graffiti rose in years 2007 and 2008. In 2003, an average of 4.19 intelligible pieces of graffiti was found per desk. In 2007, an average of 8.54 pieces of intelligible graffiti was found per desk. And, in 2008, an average of 7.74 pieces of intelligible graffiti was found per desk. Therefore, the amount of graffiti found on student desktops essentially doubled from 2003 to 2007-08.

An analysis of the content of desktop graffiti reveals that some things stayed the same, while some things changed significantly. Across all three years, the most common theme remains The University. And, Greek Life is one of the most popular categories across all three years. However, Sex—one of the most popular categories in 2003—drops drastically, from 16.3% (2003) to 1.65% (2007) and 2.15% (2008). Drugs, also one of the most popular categories in 2003 (7.45%), occurred much less frequently in 2007 (1.38%) and 2008 (0.98%).

Another relatively popular category in 2003 was Curse Words, at 6.20%. However, Curse Words occur less often in 2007 (3.14%) and 2008 (2.27%). And, Sports were mentioned far more often in 2003 (5.34%) than in 2007 (1.49%) and 2008 (1.59%).

A category which stands out in 2007 and 2008 is that of Love Messages, of which a significant number were found (6.10% and 6.92%, respectively). However, in 2003, Love Messages was not a particularly popular category, at just 1.30%.

Two categories which remained fairly stable across each year are Political and Religion. Political constituted an average of 1.31% of the graffiti across years 2003, 2007, and 2008. Religion constituted an average of 3.12% of the graffiti across years 2003, 2007, and 2008.

Significant to the present study, racist graffiti declined across the time periods, and changed in both amount and content. In 2003, seven pieces (0.39%) of racist graffiti were uncovered. Each of the seven pieces targeted Asian Americans. In 2007, five pieces (0.19%) of racist graffiti were uncovered. Three targeted African Americans, one targeted Asian Americans, and one targeted Middle Easterners. And, in 2008, just one piece (0.03%) of racist graffiti was found, which targeted African Americans.

Given the race of the perpetrator of the 4/16 massacre, I wondered if racist graffiti targeting Asian Americans would be found in higher numbers compared to the measures taken in 2003. On the contrary, racist graffiti targeting Asian Americans declined in 2007 and was non-existent in 2008. My longitudinal analysis of desktop graffiti does not suggest a hostile campus climate for Asian American undergraduates at Virginia Tech; it is for this reason that I ceased data collection. I had answered my original question: does the desktop graffiti at Virginia Tech provide evidence of a hostile climate for Asian Americans at Virginia Tech? No.

I also wondered if student desktops would come to serve as memorials to 4/16, or outlets for frustration related to 4/16. While I did not encounter graffiti lamenting 4/16, I did find graffiti which represented 4/16 Solidarity, including items such as “neVer 4 geT,” drawings of remembrance ribbons, and the names of victims who died in the massacre.

Table 14: Graffiti by Category Across Three Time Periods*

Category of Graffiti	2003	2007	2008
4/16 Solidarity	n/a	0.65% (17 total)	0.83% (22 total)
Alcohol	1.19% (21)	0.46% (12)	0.0% (0)
Anti-School	0.96% (17)	1.22% (32)	0.34% (9)
Curse Words	6.20% (109)	3.14% (82)	2.27% (60)
Depression	1.08% (19)	0.53% (14)	0.53% (14)
Drugs	7.45% (131)	1.38% (36)	0.98% (26)
Greek Life	15.01% (264)	6.67% (174)	3.97% (105)
Love Message	1.30% (23)	6.10% (159)	6.92% (183)
Math Equation	2.04% (36)	4.95% (129)	1.89% (50)
Music	6.65% (117)	2.80% (73)	2.23% (59)
Political	1.87% (33)	0.95% (25)	1.13% (30)
Racism	0.39% (7)	0.19% (5)	0.03% (1)
Religion	3.24% (57)	3.64% (95)	2.49% (66)
Sex	16.3% (287)	1.65% (43)	2.15% (57)

Sports	5.34% (94)	1.49% (39)	1.59% (42)
University	26.79% (471)	15.66% (408)	20.37% (538)
Violence	0.39% (7)	0.65% (17)	1.02% (27)

* This table highlights categories of graffiti that are noteworthy for the current study; it is not an exhaustive list of categories of graffiti used in this analysis.

E. Concluding Thoughts

The study of desktop graffiti can serve as an unobtrusive measure of campus climate. The current project considers how campus climate may have changed since the 4/16 massacre. Using pre-4/16 and post-4/16 measures of desktop graffiti, I identify popular themes found in the graffiti, and measure the shifts in amount of desktop graffiti produced by student authors. The longitudinal nature of this analysis allows us to tie it to a specific event in history: the 4/16 massacre. The graffiti collected in round one of data collection (2003) provides us with an initial measure of the campus climate at Virginia Tech. The graffiti collected in subsequent rounds, in 2007 and 2008, serve as measures which can be compared to the initial measure.

When I decided to include an analysis of desktop graffiti in the current study, I was particularly interested in what the graffiti might reflect about campus climate tied to the events of 4/16. Graffiti from 2003 contained very few pieces of racist graffiti, yet all targeted Asian Americans. Given the race of the perpetrator of the massacre, I wondered if racist graffiti targeting Asian Americans would increase. Related to this, I wondered if the student desktops might somehow be repurposed as either memorials in remembrance of 4/16, or sounding boards lamenting it.

Racist graffiti sharply decreased over the three time periods. Although scarce to begin with, seven pieces were discovered in 2003, five pieces were discovered in 2007, and just one piece was discovered in 2008. While all racist graffiti from 2003 targeted Asian Americans, just one piece in 2007, and zero in 2008, targeted Asian Americans.

The student desktops were repurposed in some instances as memorials to the victims and/or events of 4/16. However, these memorials were not particularly common (just 17 in 2007, and 22 in 2008, less than 1% of the total discernable graffiti from either year). And, these memorials were not particularly elaborate. They were really just extensions of graffiti in support of the University.

The student desktops were not repurposed as sounding boards lamenting 4/16—at least not explicitly. I did not find any evidence in the graffiti of anguish directly tied to the massacre. In terms of trends, or lack thereof, found in the desktop graffiti in general:

- The amount of graffiti nearly doubled from 2003 to 2007-08. The analysis that occurred in the months following the massacre revealed the most graffiti.
- The University was the most popular theme across all three time periods. It was most popular pre-4/16; least popular in the months following the massacre; and then on the rise again in terms of popularity a year after the event.
- Greek Life was a common theme across all three time periods; in each round of data collection Greek Life was one of the three most popular categories.
- Sex, Drugs, and Curse Words—popular themes in 2003—sharply decreased following the massacre.
- Sex's popularity in 2003 is in-line with other studies of indoor graffiti, which reveal time and again sex to be the most popular topic contained in the graffiti. However, the lack of graffiti of a sexual nature in 2007 and 2008 runs counter to this trend.
- Love Messages, while not a noteworthy category in 2003, stood out in 2007 and 2008 as one of the three most popular categories.

While I cannot be certain why the changes in terms of amount and content of graffiti exist, several possibilities/observations can be considered. The first has to do with the rise in amount of graffiti: perhaps following the massacre, students were feeling particularly introspective about life—about themselves as individuals; about the place they—at least at the time—called home, the University; about their connections to society more generally.

The second possibility has to do with the continued support for the University. Although pro-Virginia Tech graffiti dipped to 15.66% in 2007, it remained the most popular category of graffiti across all three time periods—even in light of what remains the most devastating school shooting in the nation’s history, a crime that rocked the University, the community, the state, the nation, the globe. As a parallel measure, consider the fact that applications to the University went *up* in the year following the massacre. While the massacre could have been devastating to Virginia Tech’s reputation, the University used it as an opportunity to rebrand itself and to showcase the strength of the campus community to the world [a number of what might be called—brashly—“marketing techniques” made this rebrand campaign a success, including Nikki Giovanni’s slogan “We are Virginia Tech”].

Thirdly, themes that were prevalent in the 2003 graffiti—namely, Sex, Drugs, and Curse Words—were decidedly less-prevalent in 2007 and 2008. That is, three of the most risqué themes overall dropped significantly in popularity following the massacre. Reasons for this could include the possibility that following the massacre, students had other things on their minds besides sex, drugs, and profanity. Or, perhaps following the massacre and faced with the fragility of life, students—subconsciously or consciously—aimed to live more positively and to be more respectful of one another.

Fourth, the category of Love Messages was one of the three most popular categories in 2007 and 2008.

In conclusion, a longitudinal analysis of desktop graffiti, pre- and post-4/16, reveals that prior to the massacre, racist graffiti was rare. However, that which was uncovered targeted Asian Americans. Following the massacre, while graffiti writing went up, racist graffiti went down. And, graffiti targeting Asian Americans decreased and then disappeared. Therefore, the content analysis of desktop graffiti does not suggest a hostile campus climate for Asian Americans at Virginia Tech.

Earlier in the chapter, I set forth three related hypotheses concerning my expectations of what would be revealed in the desktop graffiti. Only one of the hypotheses was strongly supported by the data: **H3**. Sex will be a prominent theme in student-authored desktop graffiti at Virginia Tech. My second hypothesis, **H2**. Student-authored desktop graffiti at Virginia Tech will reveal themes related to social politics and the freedom of expression, received modest support. And, **H1**. Student-authored desktop graffiti at Virginia Tech will reveal themes too sensitive for public discourse, including racist remarks, was not supported by the data. Although I found racist remarks in the first round of data collection, the number of racist remarks in the second and third rounds of data collection declined.

CHAPTER 6: Discussion

This chapter begins with a summary of findings from the present study. I then discuss these findings in relation to my expectations based on a review of the literature. In brief, the central directional hypotheses I set forth at the beginning of this study (Chapter 1) received low levels of support; in this chapter, I assess my findings and consider several reasons for the discrepancies between my expectations and my findings.

A. Discussion of Central Findings

The present study employed several different research methods: content analysis of desktop graffiti (pre- and post-4/16), campus climate surveys (1998, 2006), and in-depth interviews with 18 Asian American undergraduates at Virginia Tech post-4/16/2007 and 1/21/2009. Findings from each of the three methods suggest a neutral-to-positive campus climate for Asian Americans at Virginia Tech. While desktop graffiti analyzed pre-4/16 contained anti-Asian slurs, desktop graffiti analyzed post-4/16 does not. Moreover, desktop graffiti post-4/16 suggests a positive campus climate in general; an abundance of support for the University was found, as was an apparent increase in solidarity, evidenced via graffiti that represented a community coming together, healing, rebuilding itself, surviving in the face of tragedy. Increased solidarity produced by tragic events is a documented trend by social scientists (for example, see Carretero & Angel 2003; Collins 2004; Hawdon, Ryan & Agnich 2010; Sweet 1998; Turkel 2002). An analysis of the post-4/16 graffiti offers support for this trend.

The 1998 and 2006 campus climate surveys are suggestive of an increasingly positive campus climate for Asian Americans at Virginia Tech. Although Asian Americans appear to be close to whites on most measures on the 1998 survey, they even more closely resemble whites on

the 2006 survey. According to data from both surveys, whites experience the most positive campus climate at Virginia Tech, followed closely by Asian Americans. Data from the post-tragedy survey offer further evidence of the positive campus climate experienced by Asian Americans at Virginia Tech.

Findings from the in-depth interviews conducted with Asian American undergraduates at Virginia Tech suggest that Virginia Tech is a welcoming environment for members of this group. All respondents spoke positively about Virginia Tech; not a single respondent claimed their race had caused a problem for them while at Virginia Tech. Moreover, respondents were uninterested in the events of 4/16 and the GLC Incident, events which I worried would cause members of this group strain and stress because of the link between their race and the race of the perpetrator in each case. When respondents spoke about the events, they often cited these events as evidence of what a strong community Virginia Tech hosts—one that has bounced back from tragedy and is better than ever before. Each respondent who was asked “Would you recommend Virginia Tech to someone like yourself?” answered “Yes” without hesitation.

A review of the literature led me to expect a very different campus climate from what I found for Asian Americans at Virginia Tech. Asian Americans are commonly thought of as the “model minority,” although social scientists agree that this stereotype is a myth (Lee 2009). Moreover, the stereotype of the “model minority” can be detrimental to Asian American students (Chou & Feagin 2008). Past research has shown that Asian Americans routinely experience less than positive campus climates. Therefore, I expected Asian American undergraduates at Virginia Tech would report stress stemming from both their race and their “model minority” status. Moreover, I expected my respondents would report stress stemming from the connection

between their race and the race of the perpetrators of 4/16 and the GLC Incident. However, my expectations were unfounded.

The strength of this project is that all three methods I employed—content analysis, surveys, and in-depth interviews—pointed to the same conclusion: that Asian Americans at Virginia Tech have neutral to positive experiences at Virginia Tech, and that their race has not caused problems for them, even in light of tragic events on campus. Below, I consider possible reasons for the discrepancies between my expectations and my findings. Before considering these possibilities, I will offer my own interpretation of what I found. As noted earlier, in-depth interviews were at the heart of this study—and, although what my respondents told me in the course of each interview ran counter to my expectations, I believe interview respondents were accurately representing their experiences at Virginia Tech via their narratives. I believe that Asian Americans at Virginia Tech, by and large, have good things to say about Virginia Tech because their time on campus has been positive, and they have made progress at both the individual and group level. A number of respondents characterized Virginia Tech as the place they “came of age” and/or made serious progress academic- and career-wise. Respondents characterized Virginia Tech as being responsible in many regards for the success and accomplishments about which they now spoke—therefore, their association with the university was favorable.

B. Methodological Explanations for Interview Findings

Possible Explanation: Interview respondents were not entirely forthcoming.

In social science research, especially that which is qualitative, the role of the researcher—and the possible impact of the role of the researcher on research subjects and subsequent

findings—must be considered. In the course of the in-depth interviews I conducted, I was surprised to hear from respondent after respondent that race was no longer an issue, that they in fact had little to no experience with racism, and that their experiences at Virginia Tech had been overwhelmingly positive. Earlier data, including desktop graffiti and findings from two campus climate surveys, indicated a less positive campus climate for Asian Americans compared to whites at Virginia Tech. However, the stories my respondents told about their experiences at Virginia Tech were overwhelmingly positive.

In this section, I consider the possibility that interview respondents were less than forthcoming. Specifically, I identify three possible mitigating factors which may have led my respondents to be less than forthcoming in the course of the in-depth interviews: unequal power relations; race and gender of the researcher; and, context in which the interview takes place. However, I offer the idea that respondents were less than forthcoming as a possibility, not a statement of fact or an assumption.

In general, interviews have been the focus of criticism because they closely resemble something that most of us take part in on a daily basis—conversation—yet as all seasoned social scientists know, the interview is neither as simple as day-to-day conversation, nor as common. As Kvale and Brinkmann (2000) note, “The closeness of the research interview to everyday conversation may imply a certain simplicity, but this simplicity is illusory” (p.15). Interviews have also raised concerns of an ethical nature—the interviewer must carefully practice his craft so as to provide a “stage” where his subject feels free to speak openly about the topic at hand (Kvale & Brinkmann 2000). The interviewer must develop a social relationship with his respondent that encourages forthcoming responses in light of the fact all statements are being recorded, and may be available for public use in the future (Kvale & Brinkmann 2000). In his

book *Respect*, Richard Sennett (2004) captures the friction between the pursuit of knowledge on the one hand and ethical regard for one's subject on the other:

In-depth interviewing is a distinctive, often frustrating craft. Unlike a pollster asking questions, the in-depth interviewer wants to probe the responses people give. To probe, the interviewer cannot be stonily impersonal; he or she has to give something of himself or herself in order to merit an open response. Yet the conversation lists in one direction; the point is not to talk the way friends do. The interviewer all too frequently finds that he or she has offended subjects, transgressing a line over which only friends or intimates can cross. The craft consists in calibrating social distances without making the subject feel like an insect under a microscope (p. 37-38).

This excerpt from Sennett, with its mention of the “one-way street” nature of the interview, brings us to the first of several mitigating factors I identify that may have skewed the results of my in-depth interviews: unequal power relations.

Unequal Power Relations

A drawback of the use of in-depth interviews in qualitative research stems from the possibility of unequal power relations. A vocal critic of the popularity of interviews in social science research is Steinvar Kvale (2002: 12-13), who identifies six aspects of the asymmetrical power relation of the interview:

The asymmetrical power relation of the interview: The researcher defines the interview situation, initiates it, dictates its theme and flow, and ends it.

The interview is a one-way dialogue: The interviewer asks the questions, and the respondent responds. For the respondent to pose questions is non-normative.

The interview is often an indirect conversation: The researcher may be pursuing a “hidden agenda”; i.e. the respondent may not be aware of the real reason/s why the interview is being conducted.

The interviewer’s place between roles of participant and observer: During the course of the interview, the interviewer comes to occupy the space between the clearly defined roles of participant and observer, for as he engages in conversation with the respondent, he may appear as a participant, yet is still for all intents and purposes an observer.

The interview as an instrumental dialogue: The interview is an instrument which provides the researcher with information that he needs; a solid conversation is not a goal in and of itself, but rather a means to an end for the researcher.

The interviewer’s monopoly of interpretation: The interviewer, as the “big interpreter,” maintains the privilege to interpret and report what the interviewee meant in the statements he set forth.

Although Kvale is critical of interviews in social science research, he does not suggest we abandon their use altogether. Rather, he sets forth alternatives to the traditional interview, which he refers to as “agnostic approaches” to interviewing. In these approaches, the power and conflict potential of the interview is openly acknowledged, thereby diminishing the inherent inequality of the interview situation (Kvale 2002: 17). An example of an agnostic approach is the collaborative interview, in which the researcher and the subject both pose questions, interpret data, and draw conclusions (Kvale & Brinkmann 2000: 34).

Race and Gender of the Interviewer

Although a bounty of studies have explored the relationship between demographic characteristics of the interviewer, and the responses of the interviewee, few studies have found an association (Singleton & Straits 2012). However, several studies [see, for example, Anderson, Silver & Abramson 1988; Davis 1997; Finkel, Guterbock, & Borg 1991; Krysan &

Couper 2003; Schumann & Converse 1971; Weeks & Moore 1981] have found that there is a relationship between the race of the interviewer and the interviewee's "racially relevant" responses (Singleton & Straits 2012). The literature has established that blacks typically give answers in-line with anti-black and conservative sentiments when being interviewed by a white interviewer. And, in a related trend, whites offer pro-black and liberal sentiments when being interviewed by a black interviewer. This suggests that respondents will provide answers they perceive the interviewer will approve of, at least along racial lines.

Less is clear concerning other demographic characteristics; however, one imagines that when a characteristic is particularly visible and/or relevant, that characteristic may influence the shape of the interview (Singleton & Straits 2012). For example, according to research by Emily Kane and Laura Macaulay (1993), gender appears to influence the shape of the interview: in their research, on those items measuring gender role attitudes, both males and females gave more egalitarian answers when being interviewed by a female. Reasons for the race and gender of interviewer effect may be related to the human tendency to offer socially desirable answers when confronted with difficult questions—Streb, Burrell, Frederick, and Genovese (2008) have shown, in their use of an unobtrusive measure, the "list experiment," (as opposed to obtrusive measures such as interviews and public opinion surveys) that this tendency exists beyond interviewer effects, and is present in public opinion surveys as well (p. 79).

As noted above, interview characteristics that are less visible or relevant to the situation at hand do not appear to influence the shape of the interview. However, when it comes to characteristics such as gender and race, there appears to be an influence. Scholars are generally uncertain about what should be done: do we "match" the interviewer and interviewee along all visible and/or relevant lines? Will this lessen the unwelcome influence? Or, will new and

different influences (resulting from such similarity, rather than difference) be produced? Race-matching may not be the answer, for this reason, and others: data suggest race has a minor difference when it comes to survey questions (Schuman & Converse 1971); and, some data dispute that race matching increases validity (Anderson, et al. 1988).

Context in Which the Interview Takes Place

The location of my interviews—on campus and in public spaces—may have had an impact on the outcome of the interviews. Little attention has been paid to the question of location of the interview; however, *who* selects this location, *why* the location is selected, *how* the location is selected, and *what* the location is is important (Herzog 2012).

When interview location *has* come up in scholarly discussions of conducting interviews, it has been more about logistics and convenience and less about meaning [see, for example, Seidman 1991]. However, location of the interview is related to issues of power and the social construction of reality (Herzog 2012). For example, most often, the interviewer—rather than the respondent—selects the location where the interview takes place. While certainly the interviewer takes into consideration the perspective of the interviewee—such as convenience—the social meaning of the interview location is not customarily taken into consideration when selected (Herzog 2012). As Hanna Herzog (2012) notes, the location of the interview is significant beyond “convenience,” and this significance must be taken into consideration:

Using terms such as “comfortable atmosphere,” “convenience,” “intimacy,” or “friendliness” as explanations for the choice of the interview location depoliticizes the research process. It ignores the power relations that are produced, reproduced, and challenged continuously within the interview process. Locations, their boundaries, and their social meaning are negotiated, contested, and constituted in the interview process as

in other social arenas. At the same time, these socially constructed locations are part of our knowledge production and, therefore, must be part of our research.

Beyond convenience, the interview location can produce and reproduce the already significant power differential between interviewer and interviewee. Moreover, the location of the interview plays a salient role in the social construction of reality, and this in turn may impact the shape and tone the interview takes. According to Herzog (2012), selection of interview location is of utmost importance in the interview process.

Discussion

Methodological issues may be the reason, or part of the reason, for the unanticipated narratives my respondents shared. As noted earlier, only one of my central directional hypotheses was moderately supported by the findings from my interviews. The other four were not supported by the findings from my interviews. Below, I consider the methodological issues which may have shaped my findings.

Unequal power relations: Unequal power relations were present in each interview I conducted. In each case, I was a graduate student, and my respondents were undergraduates. Thus, I had seniority, in terms of age, class standing, and title. I also shared with most respondents that I was an instructor of sociology at Virginia Tech; therefore, in the eyes of some, I may have been seen as a professor.

Unequal power relations were also present as Kvale (2002) conceives of them: I defined the interview situation, initiated it, dictated its theme and flow, and in all but one case—when a respondent had to leave to meet his ride, who was waiting outside—ended it. I was also the one asking the questions—when respondents asked me questions, they were either in relation to a

question I had just posed (“What do you mean by ‘model minority’?” for example), or they were not related to the interview per se: “I love the color of your pen! Where did you buy it?”

Moreover, I was pursuing an agenda that I chose to keep hidden. I was interested in whether or not respondents brought up April 16th and what they had to say about it. However, I did not bring this topic up, and I did not state that April 16th was one of the reasons for my research.

Further, following Kvale (2002), in each interview, I did come to occupy the space between “participant” and “observer,” for I was able to establish a sound rapport in each case, so as to make the interview more resemble a conversation than an interview. While I certainly enjoyed speaking with my respondents, a good conversation was not my primary goal; rather, learning from respondents about their experiences was my goal. Finally, although I worked with dissertation committee members to interpret the findings of the interviews, I was one of the primary interpreters of this data. Even in the course of the interview, I was constantly interpreting, and in response steering the conversation in one direction or another.

Race and Gender of the Interviewer: In most cases (12), I was different along both racial and gender lines from my respondents. In all cases, I was different along racial lines from my respondents. And, I am a white American, which is generally understood to be the racial/ethnic category with the most status and privilege in the United States. In terms of my gender, I am considered a member of the minority group—however, this is not to say my gender did not have an influence on the shape my interviews took. Had I been an Asian American, male or female, the findings of my interviews may have been different.

Context in Which the Interview Takes Place: In all cases, interviews were conducted in public spaces on the Virginia Tech campus. Although I gave respondents some say regarding where on campus they wanted to be interviewed, I dictated the general location. Once I had established contact with a potential interviewee and settled upon a date and time for the interview, I suggested several “neutral” locations on campus where we could meet: the library, the student center, a bench on campus, and so forth. In hindsight, perhaps the very location of the interview—on campus—was anything but neutral; following Herzog (2012), this location may have reproduced the social reality and the social stock given to the University.

In terms of where, specifically, on campus interviews took place, I learned through trial and error what worked best. In one instance, I met a respondent in the lobby of a science building in which he was working—while this was convenient for him, we were confronted with the constant “ding” of an elevator in the lobby. In another instance, I met a respondent in a quiet hallway in the library which suddenly became very noisy as a tour group passed by. With each interview, I recognized the importance of quiet and relative privacy—thus, after trying out various locations, I eventually committed to either a quiet unoccupied classroom in Torgersen, or a study room in the library. Although locations varied, all interviews were located on campus, in public spaces, and in spaces that reaffirmed the presence of Virginia Tech. That is, in each interview, where one was was not easily forgotten—unlike a dorm room or theater on campus, where one might feel transported to another time and place—the location of Virginia Tech was salient in each interview.

C. Virginia Tech's Positive Campus Climate

Possible Explanation: Virginia Tech is unique.

Findings from each of the methods I employed in the present study suggest that Virginia Tech hosts a positive campus climate for Asian American undergraduates. Based on my review of the literature, which states that Asian Americans are the target of race-based prejudice and discrimination, especially in academic settings, I expected to find otherwise. Numerous pieces of research have documented the negative climates Asian Americans experience in educational settings.

A possible explanation for the discrepancy between the literature and my findings is that Virginia Tech is an anomaly—it is unique, in that it hosts a positive campus climate for Asian Americans. Why might Virginia Tech stand out from other academic institutions? One possible explanation is geographic: Virginia Tech is located in the rural South, a part of the country that has had its share of hostile race relations. However, race-related tension has historically been between African Americans and whites.

Although the literature on Asian Americans in the South is scant, one piece of classic scholarship dating back several decades indicates that their experiences have been different from other racial minorities in the South, especially different from African Americans. In *The Mississippi Chinese: Between Black and White*, James Loewen (1971) documents the experiences of Chinese immigrants in the Mississippi Delta. While they originally came to the United States to work as farm laborers (to fill the need created by the emancipation of slaves), they were not easily molded into the role of “laborer” answering to the “bossman” (Loewen 1971). Instead, they put their entrepreneurial talents to work, soon abandoning farm work and

setting up grocery stores in the Delta region which catered to recently-freed slaves. Chinese Americans in this part of the country have been astute businessmen ever since—as recently as 1960, in some parts of the Delta, Chinese Americans had close to a monopoly on the grocery business (Loewen 1971: ix).

Another possible explanation related to the uniqueness of Virginia Tech is that Tech is advanced concerning its diversity policies and initiatives, compared to other institutions of higher education. It follows that universities that are advanced in terms of diversity policies can be expected to house positive campus climates.

D. Literature on Asian American Stereotyping Exaggerates the Problem

Possible Explanation: The literature on race-based prejudice and discrimination faced by Asian Americans is overblown.

Although there exists a great body of literature on the hardships faced by Asian Americans in the U.S., both in the past and present day, there remains a possibility that the literature suggests things are worse for Asian Americans than they really are. Related to this, perhaps the literature has yet to catch up with the increasingly positive experiences Asian Americans are having in the U.S. Scholars of Asian American studies have built their careers on claims that Asian Americans face race-based prejudice and discrimination at rates similar to other racial/ethnic minorities. If this trend fades, or was not as strong to begin with as scholars claimed, what is to make of the pioneers of the discipline?

There are a few vocal critics of Asian American studies, especially studies within this category that make claims concerning race-based hardships. For example, in “The Myth of the Model Minority Myth,” recently published in *Sociological Spectrum*, Arthur Sakamoto and

colleagues (2012) argue that the myth of the “model minority” is a myth in and of itself. In this article, they argue that the myth of the “model minority” is based on faulty statistical reasoning; that the hypotheses derived from the myth of the “model minority” are largely false; and, that the political arguments associated with the myth are far too simplistic. According to Sakamoto, et al. (2012), the myth of the “model minority” myth persists because of politics and elitism in education:

[The] model minority myth persists because it promotes the socioeconomic self-interests of the professors who currently control the Asian American Studies establishment that in turn provides political legitimacy for the universities that employ them. The political legitimacy of universities is increasingly crucial due to their spiraling costs when combined with the general decline of the American economy, the increasing significance of educational credentialism, and the pivotal role of universities in rationing access to the remaining better jobs in the increasingly unequal labor market (309-310).

Sakamoto, et al. (2012) contend that the “model minority” myth is yet another example of the exploitation and disenfranchisement of members of the working class in the U.S. However, should one critique this myth, according to Sakamoto, et al. (2012: 316), one should expect to face harsh criticism: “The general supposition seems to be that if one does not espouse the ‘model minority’ myth, then one must be seeking to ‘blame the victims’ of racial and ethnic inequalities [see, for example, Min 1995: 52].”

E. Asian American Undergraduates are Giving Socially Desirable Responses as a Minimization Tactic

Possible Explanation: Asian Americans are offering what they believe to be the “socially-desirable” responses to survey and interview queries in order to minimize the social distance between themselves and the majority.

Another explanation may be that interview and survey respondents offered socially desirable responses to minimize the distance between themselves and the majority group. After all, the system is working in their favor, so criticizing it would be counter-productive. On the other end of the spectrum, we have African Americans, for whom the system is decidedly not working, and who, according to the campus climate surveys, are quite critical of it.

Recent debates in the news are reflective of various racial and ethnic groups' presence on campus: recent proposals to reinstate affirmative action policies in the state of California, where Asian Americans are enrolled at some of the state's top colleges in numbers that far exceed their proportion of the population, have been met with backlash by the Asian American population. Although a racial minority, they fear that such policies would decrease members of their group's acceptance to institutes of higher education in the state. And, as stated above, the ways things are currently seem to be working: for example, according to the University of California system, 36% of its in-state freshman admissions offers for Fall 2014 are to Asian Americans, 29% are to Latino students, 27% are to white students, and 4% are to African American students (Williams 2014, April 23). Asian Americans account for almost half of the admitted freshmen at several schools in the state, including UC San Diego and UC Irvine (Williams 2014, April 23).

F. Concluding Thoughts

This study measured the campus climate at Virginia Tech for a specific racial group, Asian Americans. Asian Americans are commonly considered the “model minority,” although social scientists contend this stereotype is both untrue and at times harmful for those to whom it is applied. In addition, Asian American was also the race of the perpetrator in two tragic events that occurred on campus in the span of less than two years: the April 16th shootings and the beheading in the Graduate Life Center.

I was interested in better understanding the campus climate for Asian Americans before and after the April 16th massacre and the GLC Incident alongside what is known about the social location of Asian American students nationally. Using several methods, including surveys, in-depth interviews, and content analysis, I measured the climate for Asian American undergraduates at Virginia Tech. Based on a review of the literature, I expected to find that Asian American undergraduates experience a hostile climate at Virginia Tech, because of both their “model minority” status and their racial group’s connection to tragic events.

Of the central directional hypotheses I set forth in Chapter 1, only one of my five stated hypotheses was supported: that Asian American undergraduates at Virginia Tech are in favor of diversity initiatives. My research indicates that Asian American undergraduates at Virginia Tech *do not* report experiencing patterns of prejudice and/or discrimination associated with their race/ethnicity on campus. Additionally, my findings suggest that Asian American undergraduates at Virginia Tech *do not* report experiencing stress and tension stemming from their “model minority” status while at Virginia Tech. Moreover, I did not find support for my directional hypothesis that Asian American undergraduates at Virginia Tech would report that, in

general, Virginia Tech hosts an uncomfortable, and at times hostile, campus climate. Finally, nothing in my findings suggests that Asian American undergraduates at Virginia Tech have been subjected to hostility related to the events of 4/16/2007 and/or 1/21/2009.

Taken more generally, my research does not lend support for the widely-accepted literature in Asian American studies that argues that Asian American students suffer due to their race, and due to their “model minority” status. Using a multi-method approach, I measured campus climate for Asian Americans at Virginia Tech, and my findings suggest that as a group, Asian American undergraduates at Virginia Tech report experiencing a welcoming and generally positive campus climate. Respondents whom I interviewed spoke about the good times they have had at Virginia Tech; at the same time, they highly conformed to the “model minority” stereotype. While the literature argues that the “model minority” stereotype is detrimental to those to whom it is applied, the experiences of my respondents suggest otherwise. The “model minority” stereotype seems to have worked in their favor, although most of them were not aware of its existence, or were only aware of it insofar as in-group humor went.

The findings from this study sharply contrast with the widely-accepted body of literature in Asian American studies which contends that Asian American college students face prejudice and discrimination, and that this prejudice and discrimination is harmful to them. Reasons for my findings include possible methodological issues, including unequal power relations, race/gender of the interviewer, and the context in which the interviews took place. Another possible explanation is that Virginia Tech is unique, in that it is an academic institution at which Asian Americans do not suffer due to their “model minority” status. It may be that at schools with a higher proportion of Asian Americans in the student body, there would be a greater perception of “minority threat” on the part of non-Asian American students. Another possibility

is that the literature in Asian American studies exaggerates the problems that Asian American students face. A final possibility is that Asian American respondents, on both surveys and in interviews, gave socially desirable responses as a minimization tactic—providing such responses minimizes the gap between them and the majority group.

Limitations of the present study include the small sample size of interview respondents, and the fact that all interview respondents were from one of two sub-categories of Asian American, Chinese or Korean. Another limitation is that all respondents were undergraduates, and all were Asian American, rather than Asian national. The possibility exists that graduate students and/or Asian nationals have experienced a different campus climate at Virginia Tech than members of my sample. In addition, since many students interviewed for this study were active members of the Asian American student organization on campus, perhaps membership in that club shielded them from experiencing the prejudice and discrimination they might otherwise have felt.

My research demonstrates the complexity of race and race relations, and stands in contrast to a widely accepted body of literature on a specific racial group, Asian Americans, in a specific social location, higher education. Directions for future research should include further study of the linkages between campus climate and student attitudes toward minorities, whether based on: race; ethnicity; gender; social class; or sexual orientation.

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