



IDENTITY, CONSUMPTION, AND NIGHTLIFE:

**CONSTRUCTING INTRA-ETHNIC BOUNDARIES
IN AN ASIAN AMERICAN YOUTH CULTURE**

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- Examining interplay between:
 - Consumption, taste, and style
 - Constructions of ethnic identity, acculturation, and authenticity
- In an Asian American youth culture



- Cultural consumption:
 - (cars, clothes, music, drugs)
 - Construction of identities
 - Marking symbolic boundaries between social groups



- Drug consumption as consumption
 - Interrelated with other types of consumption
 - Not “essentialized substances” (McDonald)

- Ethnicity and drug consumption
 - Not only (ethnic and other) identities shape drug consumption patterns
 - Also: social and cultural patterns of drug (and other) consumption may play a role in construction of identities and group boundaries



METHODS & SAMPLE

- In-depth interviews with 250 young adult Asian Americans (2005-7)
- Inclusion criteria
 - “Club drug” use
 - Participation in dance club or rave scenes in San Francisco Bay Area



SYMBOLIC BOUNDARIES

- Symbolic boundaries: “conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize objects, people, practices....” (Lamont & Molnar 2003)
- Intertwined with discourses about:
 - social class, foreignness, authenticity, and the accomplishment of gender



“I JUST DON’T LIKE FOBS”

- “FOB” (fresh off the boat)
 - Derogatory term for new immigrants
 - A figure against which to define oneself



FOB AS THE OTHER

- “I actually kind of laugh at ‘em. I think it’s so funny . . . Because they’re so different . . . They stick out like sore thumbs . . .
- “A FOB is somebody who is learning how to be an engineer and talking funny, and not eating meat because they’re veggie. And, they talk funny.”

-- Janav (Indian, 28)

- Language



FOBS AND “TRADITION”

- “It’s not just the way you carry yourself or what you wear, how you put your hair, how you smell like Indian curry, how you have an accent, but it’s also your mentality. Like . . . a FOB guy will date like a girl from America that’s . . . Indian origin and he’ll be like, “Oh, you need to tie your hair back. Don’t wear that low-cut thing in public.” To say all these rules to her . . . like my parents are not as strict as this dude.”

-- Ojal (Indian, 27)

- Gender/sexuality



FASHION/STYLE AS ULTIMATE MARKER OF “FOBBINESS”

- FOBs indicate a different taste culture (Bourdieu)
- “Like the guys they always have long hair. They always have this one style of hair that I know is popular in, you know, whatever Asian country right now. Um, the girls always have like the same hairstyle, too [long straight, with highlights]. . . they wear ugly things too. . . just tacky . . . Cause they’ll copy the styles, like in Asian countries, you know the Japanese start the style, the Koreans copy it . . .”

-- Brenda (Korean, 25)



- Disidentifying with foreignness and foreign-born Asian Americans (Kibria 2002)
 - The ways young Asian Americans must continually shore up and establish their American identities



“I’M NO TWINKIE”

- Derek (Chinese/Vietnamese, 27), criticizing ABCs (American-born Chinese) who have “lost” their culture:
 - “They’re a sell-out. They’re a twinkie. They’re a banana”
 - Can be spotted by preppy clothes, white girlfriends, and certain car preferences



WHITEWASHED

- “If you’re not that traditional Banana Republic Chinese American, then, and you like to wear, you know, more outspoken clothes, then you become more whitewashed or something [people assume]”

-- Sonya (Chinese, 24)



MUSIC AND ETHNIC AUTHENTICITY

- Rise of Hip Hop in Asian American dance scene
- “[if I’m at] one of those Asian clubs where there’s like hip hop and stuff, [and] I’m this rocker chick . . . They’ll call me like I’m the whitey or something. Twinkie”

-- Jia (Chinese, 26)

- I don’t really enjoy going to those [hip hop] events. So, that’s why I always question this, ‘How Asian Am I?’ Cuz that’s like where you would think an Asian kid would go . . . And if I don’t like to go there, and I’m not like them? Where do I fit in, basically?”

-- Jin (Chinese, 25)



BALANCE

- Between FOB and Twinkie
- need to demonstrate an appropriate balance between Asian and American– not being too foreign, yet not having lost one’s Asian culture and become too white either
 - “intercultural middle” Pyke and Dang 2003



CONSUMPTION, APPEARANCE, AND GENDER

- Doing gender, doing appearance
- How to “DO” Asian American femininities and masculinities
- “Like, I don’t look a certain way they want Asian girls to look . . . the weight. Just my whole image . . . like my lips, my skin, my arms, my thighs . . . All the girls are like, stick thin. . . and then it just like really strikes a nerve with a part of my culture that I like kind of don’t live according to, that I got whitewashed from or whatever . . . Just like the very clear idea of what femininity is. Like everybody has long, straight hair and big earrings and tight clothes on, and everyone’s wearing black . . .”

-- Tessa (Chinese/Vietnamese, 23)

- Gender accomplishment and ethnic authenticity together



“HYPHY ASIANS,” “PRETTY BOYS,” AND THUGS: MASCULINITIES

- “The pretty boy Asians. Asians you could get over. Like the Asians that would be scared of you. . . . [Pretty boys] like to be pretty all the time . . . They’ll be doing some female stuff, like, I don’t know, just putting [hair] gel on or something . . . [they wear] Old Navy and all that . . . Expensive clothes, like American Eagle and stuff . . . [but] we wear like regular white T’s . . . And just Nike and Jordans”

-- Nelson (Lao, 16)



“HYPHY ASIANS,” PRETTY BOYS, AND THUGS: MASCULINITIES

- Square Asians: Don't use drugs, don't know how to dance, and wear tight jeans, PayLess shoes and 'big ass' backpacks; Chinamens
-- Tommy (Cambodian 16)

- Hyphy Asians
- Thugs



MODEL MINORITIES?

- “I think that I might be unique [among South Asians]. I think that I may have used more drugs and alcohol than others . . . In the same way they judge me for not knowing Hindi, and that represents my assimilation into American culture, I feel like they would also judge me for assimilating . . . into drug culture”

--Brad (Indian, 24)



MODEL MINORITIES?

- “I can’t just call myself Chinese, cuz when I think of just a Chinese kid, I don’t think of a person like me [who] . . . Does like psychedelic drugs (laughs), or does like drug education volunteering that’s not like anti-drug (laughs) . . .”

-- Jin (Chinese, 25)



OTHERING IN THE RAVE SCENE: ASIAN E-PUDDLES AND E-TARDS

- “They’re not very PLUR . . . They’re just there to do, to do drugs and listen to trance . . . For the most part. They don’t socialize with anybody else. They keep to themselves. They associated with their own Asians, but that’s it”

-- Reina (Japanese/white, 20)

- “A lot of the Asians that I see in the rave scene . . . They come in large groups, they do lots of drugs, they sit on the floor, in corners, and like are totally E-tarded . . . And they all wear similar uniforms . . . The tank-tops and the jeans and sneakers and the hat. I just don’t feel I would have that much in common . . .”

-- Indira (Indian, 27)



CONCLUSION: ETHNIC SUBCULTURAL CAPITAL?

- Subcultural capital (Thornton 1996)
 - Confers status upon people based on knowledge of subcultural norms and ability to evidence hipness
- Subcultural capital intersecting with ethnic identity constructions
 - Whether criticizing FOBs, twinkies, pretty-boys, or thugs, the participants were working to distinguish themselves and their social groups by invoking appropriate displays of ethnic identity, describing themselves in opposition to “others” in the scene.
- Ethnic identity capital (Kibria 2002)
- Ethnic subcultural capital?

