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Examining Identity Construction and School Punishment through Found Poetry

Shena Sanchez and Sun Young Gu

Article abstract

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"TO BE AN ASIAN GIRL": EXAMINING IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION AND SCHOOL PUNISHMENT THROUGH FOUND POETRY

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Abstract: In this study, we explore how three Asian high school girls from poor/working-class families construct their identity in relation to their experiences with school punishment and anti-Asian sexism rooted in model minority and perpetual foreigner stereotypes. Using found poetry as a method, along with intersectionality and Asian feminist frameworks, we analyze sister circle and kitchen table focus group interviews and diagramming data. We find that, despite their different ethnicities and geographic locations, participants shared significant experiences and perspectives that centered their resistance to anti-Asian sexism,

agency and personhood, and familial responsibilities as a source of motivation to excel academically.

Keywords: Asian girls; found poetry; intersectionality; model minority myth; perpetual foreigner; school punishment

The function, the very serious function of racism is distraction. It keeps you from doing your work. It keeps you explaining, over and over again, your reason for being. Somebody says you have no language, and you spend twenty years proving that you do. Somebody says your head isn't shaped properly so you have scientists working on the fact that it is. Somebody says you have no art, so you dredge that up. Somebody says you have no kingdoms, so you dredge that up. None of this is necessary. *There will always be one more thing.* [emphasis added] (Morrison, 1975, minute 35:46)

There will always be one more thing

"You're not like a typical Asian girl.
You're more Latina because you're
loud and opinionated."

<div align="right">

What does it mean to be an Asian girl?
Is there one way to be an Asian girl?

</div>

And "you smell like rice."

<div align="right">

Is it a bad thing that my family eats rice at every meal?

</div>

And "you look and sound different.
Where are you really from?"

<div align="right">

Different from what? From whom?
Where are you expecting me to be "really" from?

</div>

And "when students are presenting, you show no reaction.
You don't nod or smile, but the opposite."

<div align="right">

You're asking me to smile more?
Do non-Asian male professors get similar comments?

</div>

And "you are…"

<div align="right">

What else?

</div>

The words of Toni Morrison (1975) resonate within us, as both authors—Asian women—encounter racism and its intersections with multiple other -isms in our daily lives. Morrison's statement—"there will always be one more thing"—succinctly captures our experiences with subtle and overt anti-Asian sexism; our poem is an extension of Morrison's statement, and reflects only a fraction of what we have been asked or told over the many years we have lived in the United States. We often feel that we must explain and prove who we are "over and over again" as there "will always be one more thing" (Morrison, 1975). In

the following, we offer a description of who we are in our shared positionality statement to illuminate where and how this inquiry began.

The first author (Shena Sanchez) is the daughter of a Filipina mother and a CHamoru father. She grew up on the island of Saipan in a multi-ethnic, -lingual, -abled, -generational home with countless family members who instilled within her a strong cultural identity. After moving to the United States as a sixteen-year-old, however, she experienced a shift in her identity construction as an Asian Pacific Islander (API) girl; she was no longer a part of the majority in her new school as few of her classmates shared her cultural background. This shift came with the pressure to not only excel academically but to be meek and submissive while she did it.

The second author (Sun Young Gu) is a Korean immigrant who emigrated to the United States in her late twenties and married an American-born white man. Throughout her time living in the United States, she experienced living in-betweenness (Anzaldúa, 2007) as if she did not belong to either South Korea or the United States. Often, she experienced a *flattening,* through which her Korean identity seemed lost and erased. Her experiences of feeling othered and being positioned as a forever foreigner have shaped her identity in the United States.

This article emerged from an examination of our own experiences as Asian women and scholars, and the ways in which we have been marked, stereotyped, and othered. As collaborators, we often discussed our experiences as we reflected upon what it means to be Asian women scholars living in the United States and how our identities are constructed in society and in the classroom. In our research and writing, we regularly engaged in a manner that embraced reflexivity (Pillow, 2003) as discussing our experiences brought us a deep understanding of each other and our scholarly inquiries. Equally important, our shared experiences—of growing up in school systems outside of the United States and now finding ourselves educated and trained at institutions of higher education within the United States—provided us with unique insights into the identity construction of our participants (i.e., teenage Asian girls in California and New York), who were often subjected to similar gendered anti-Asian sentiments that we faced in school.

Background and Overview

In the past three years, the United States has been reckoning with harm inflicted upon Asian people; the brutal attacks during the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the country's historically rooted Sinophobia while the ongoing assault and murders of Asian women (Jeung et al., 2021) punctuate the disproportionate ways they are particularly vulnerable to gender-based anti-Asian violence. One area in which harm experienced by Asian women

and girls is yet to be thoroughly addressed is in education, especially around school discipline. In response, this article explores the experiences and identity construction of Asian girls from poor/working-class families, who have been punished (e.g., reprimanded, given detention, suspended) and excluded in school by being tracked out of high-level courses (e.g., honors, college-bound, advanced placement). We focus specifically on the unique ways that Asian girls are punished for not conforming to the model minority stereotype to excel in academically normative ways (e.g., take high track courses) and be submissive to authority figures (Chou & Feagin, 2015).

This analysis explores how three Asian high school girls from poor/working-class families of different ethnic backgrounds (Korean, Cambodian, and Indonesian) make sense of their identity, particularly in relation to the punishment, exclusion, and anti-Asian sexism they experience in school. We examine how Asian girls negotiate their identity construction during instances of discipline, whether they accept, reject, or align with societal expectations of Asian girls. Moreover, we investigate the ways they perceive their identity being constructed by others (e.g., educators, classmates, community members) and their beliefs of how these constructions shape their punishment. Our analysis is guided by the following questions:

1. How do Asian girls from poor/working-class families, who do not conform to the model minority myth, experience school punishment and exclusion?
2. In what ways do Asian girls construct their identity based on their school experiences and perceptions of anti-Asian sexism?

The Absence of Asian Girls in Education Research in the United States

Previous research on Asian youth, particularly girls, has largely been around areas of mental and medical health. For example, numerous studies have explored the mental health of Asian girls in relation to body image and eating disorders (Hill & Bhatti, 1995; Robinson et al., 1996; Rodgers et al., 2018; Tummala-Narra & Yang 2019), their racialized experiences (Brady et al., 2017; Mukkamala & Suyemoto, 2018; Young et al., 2022), and the role of the media in their identity construction (Ahn et al., 2022; Gigi Durham, 2004). Extant research generally shows that Asian girls are often imagined as quiet, obedient, and academically successful while being rendered invisible in school settings and society in the United States (Hsieh & Kim, 2020). This invisibility is reflected in the limited attention offered to Asian girls in education research in the United States context, as studies based on education that focus on Asian girls have been more commonly conducted elsewhere, for example, in the United Kingdom (Abbas, 2003; Basit, 1997; Shain, 2003; Wong, 2012). As the population of Asian girls grows in the United States and gendered anti-Asian sentiments and violence persist, it is imperative to shed light on their academic experiences, especially those that are shaped by systemic oppression.

The Model Minority Myth

Of the scholarship that does examine Asian youth in educational contexts, the model minority myth (MMM) is a stereotype that has been shown to impact the experiences of many Asian students. MMM is a social construction of Asians that can be traced back to the civil rights era (Wu, 2013) and is tied to the oppression of Black people (Anand & Hsu, 2020; Yi & Todd, 2021) as a mechanism to uphold anti-Blackness by designating Asians (primarily Chinese and Japanese) as the standard for how people of color ought to conduct themselves and achieve in society. In education, MMM functions to validate notions of meritocracy and promote a race-neutral agenda to obscure systemic racism (Choi & Lim 2014; Yi et al., 2020; Yu, 2006; Zhao & Qiu, 2009) by suggesting that Asian students are academically successful because they are "hardworking, obedient, family-oriented, and entrepreneurial" (Lee & Hong, 2020, p. 165). By flattening Asian students' experiences, MMM also neglects the socioeconomic struggles faced by those living in poverty as Asians are presumed to be from middle- and upper-class (Lee et al., 2009b). Some of the educational consequences of this include poor/working-class Asian students having limited access to supportive educators, being placed in less effective learning environments, and being alienated from their school community (Lew, 2004; Ngo & Lee 2007; Qin et al., 2008; Wing, 2007).

Perpetual Foreigner

"Where are you *really* from?" is a common question that many Asian Americans are regularly asked and defines a significant part of their experience (Trazo & Kim, 2019; Wu, 2002). This question is indicative of the ways that Asians are seen as perpetual foreigners and "unwilling and/or unable to assimilate to the United States" (Lee & Hong, 2020, p. 165). In educational contexts, Asian students often experience race-based, xenophobic bullying, which contributes to their internalized struggles about their racial and ethnic identity (Chou & Feagin, 2015; Wong, 2010). In the era of COVID-19, the perpetual foreigner stereotype normalized anti-Asian sentiment and animated the increase in violent acts toward Asian people. This was evident in the fact that more than 2,000 hate crimes against Asians were documented in 2020 alone (Horse et al., 2021). Moreover, the persistent narrative of Asian peoples as perpetually foreign demonstrates the vulnerable position that they occupy in the racial hierarchy of the United States (Mistry & Kiyama, 2021).

Gendered Anti-Asian Stereotypes and School Punishment

Studies have shown that Asian students internalize anti-Asian stereotypes when constructing their racial identity, especially around their academic performance and sense of belonging in school (Kim & Lee, 2014). This internalization has been found to be harmful to

their mental health, particularly for Asian students who are not deemed to be living up to the model minority stereotypes and have become reluctant to seek academic or psychological support (Kim & Lee, 2014; Lee et al., 2009a). Specifically, studies focusing on Asian girls have demonstrated that these students are uniquely subject to MMM because of gendered anti-Asian stereotypes of meekness and docility, which negatively affect the quality of their education, psychological well-being (Lee et al., 2009a), and peer relationships (Thompson et al., 2020). There is little known however, about the schooling experiences and identity construction of Asian girls who are punished in school, are not enrolled in high track courses, and who face anti-Asian sexism. This article aims to address some of these scholarly gaps.

The extant research about school discipline experienced by Girls of Color (GoC) rarely include the specific ways that Asian girls are punished. This can partially be attributed to the fact that non-Asian GoC, primarily those who are Black and Latina, are the recipients of some of the most disproportionate and severe forms of school punishment (Annamma et al., 2019; Crenshaw et al., 2015; Peguero et al., 2017) whereas Asian and white girls are statistically disciplined at lower rates. Aligning the experiences of Asian girls with their White peers, however, neglects the race-, class-, and immigration-based realities that are present when Asian girls are punished. In other words, there is a need to account for the social location of Asian girls at the intersection of multiple forms of systemic oppression (e.g., racism, xenophobia, sexism, and classism) in order to understand their experiences with harm, punishment, and exclusion in school.

Asian Girlhoods in Educational Spaces

To date, there is limited scholarship and theorizations on the lives of Asian girls living in the United States and attending public schools. In this article, we focus on Asian girlhoods/feminisms to situate our analysis within the American contexts in which our participants live. We build upon the works of Tokunaga (2016) and Player (2021), who examine the experiences of Asian American girls using strengths-based approaches. Guided by Anzaldúa's (2007) *Borderlands* framework, and focusing on the construction of Asian girlhoods, Tokunaga (2016) examined the experiences of Asian American girls (Filipina, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Indian), who began an unofficial affinity group called the Basement Group. She found that the girls experienced displacement as they struggled to belong in their school; school was alienating and they were expected to live up to MMM, which "made them feel upset, uncomfortable, and even angry" (p. 1091). As a result of feelings of isolation, the girls created their own community where they welcomed peers from different racial/ethnic, gender, and religious backgrounds. Tokunaga's (2016) paper is an exploration of Asian girls creating spaces of joy, empowerment, and solidarity for themselves in an otherwise unwelcoming learning environment.

Player's (2021) study centered two Asian American girls who were part of a writing group for GoC, and examined how they used multiple literacies to make sense of their identity and political orientation. Grounded in AsianCrit, Women of Color feminisms, and Asian feminisms, Player demonstrated that Asian American girls explore and express identities that are "social, playful, joyful, critical, political, brazen, bold, beautiful, and rebellious" (p. 14). She also found that the emerging and evolving political frameworks of the girls in her study aligned with those of Asian American feminists. Player's article demonstrates the power in utilizing multiple literacies when working with and exploring the complex identities of Asian girls. It also highlights how research grounded in intersectional feminisms and done collaboratively with participants can help facilitate further theorizations and advocacy with and for Asian girls.

Frameworks: Intersectionality and Asian Feminisms/Epistemologies

In this analysis, we employ Crenshaw's intersectionality (1989) along with Asian feminisms and epistemologies (Chow, 1987; Yee, 2009) as the frameworks to explore how Asian girls who are punished and excluded in school make sense of their identity. Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) calls for analyses to consider the interlocking nature of oppression (e.g., racism, sexism, classism) to adequately capture the experiences of those who live multiply marginalized lives. In the same vein, Asian feminisms and epistemologies center the feminist consciousness of Asian women and girls to understand the unjust forces affecting them, as well as "their location in society and social experiences" (Chow, 1987, p. 285). This helps attend to the unique ways in which Asian girls experience oppression; in this case, at the intersection of sexism, racism, classism, and xenophobia.

Although Asian American women have been limited in their ability to grow their feminist consciousness due to oppressive forces within and outside their communities, there does exist a corpus of Asian feminism that is highly political and intersectional (Chow, 1987; Yee, 2009). Asian women came together in the late 1960s to respond to a feminist movement that lacked attention to the injustices that they uniquely experienced. Unfortunately, the persistence of gendered violence against Asian women has prevented many of them from engaging politically, resulting in their absence in political and feminist spaces as well as the under-theorization of their lived experiences (Chow 1987). In this analysis, we contribute to the ongoing development of Asian feminisms, particularly Asian girlhoods, by centering the epistemological knowledge of Asian teenage girls.

Method: Found Poetry

For this analysis, we employed found poetry, which is a form of arts-based research where "words, phrases, and sometimes whole passages that are taken from other sources" are rearranged and written into poetic representations of the data (Butler-Kisber, 2018, p. 96). As a research method, we turned to found poetry because of the way that it allowed us to prioritize the humanizing of participants by honoring their words and expressions, while also providing us (the researchers) ways to engage deeply in a reflexive process as we included some of our own words alongside the words of the participants. Weaving our words with those of the participants in a found poem offers a richer understanding of their collective and individual realities, and allows readers to access these narratives in an artful way (Glesne, 1997; Leavy, 2010; MacNeil, 2000; Poindexter, 1998; Richardson, 2002). We used found poetry because it facilitated our aim to bring the stories and perspectives of Asian girls to the forefront, centering their voices as we examined their intersectional realities and struggles with anti-Asian sexism in school.

Research Sites and Participants

Data for this analysis came from the Lavender Girls Project (LGP), a research project about the academic experiences of GoC—Asian, Black, and Latina—who had been subject to school discipline and tracked out of high-level courses (i.e., honors, Advanced Placement, college-bound). LGP was Sanchez's dissertation project and was influenced by her own schooling experiences with punishment and academic tracking. The study was grounded in critical race feminisms, and the methods she used reflected intersectional feminist approaches and frameworks. LGP was situated across five Title I high schools (public schools with high proportions of low-income students that receive federal funding to improve academic achievement) located in major metropolitan cities in California, New York, and Tennessee. For this analysis, we selected three Asian LGP participants, who reported experiencing anti-Asian sexism in school. Two of the participants (Noelle and Elena) attended the same school in New York, while the third (Amelia) was from California. In the following sections, we introduce the participants using data from focus group interview transcripts, reflective diagramming activities, and field/observation notes.

Participants

Noelle is a Korean girl from New York. She was soulful, generous, and loving, and always eager to help friends and family. Noelle also had to develop a tough exterior from years of being one of the only Asian students in her schools and being bullied for her Asianness. In one of the diagramming activities, she described herself as "lazy" and said, "I think teachers—all of them—tell me that I'm a dropout, because I hardly come to school."

When Sanchez asked why she missed school so much, Noelle clarified that she did go to school, but she was usually late because she worked. Her after-school job at a retail store required her to commute over an hour, and she typically arrived at home around midnight, leaving her little time to get enough sleep or do her homework. Noelle explained that she worked to be able to pay to participate in school activities (e.g., senior trip, prom) without financially burdening her parents. She aspired to be able to take care of her parents and be the first girl in her family to obtain a college degree.

Elena is Indonesian and Puerto Rican and was born and raised in New York. With her petite frame and kind face, Elena moved with levity and poise. She became pregnant during her freshman year and decided to keep her baby, Dez, explaining the maturity with which she carried herself. According to Elena, many people, including her educators, shamed and ridiculed her for being a teen mother. She shared that she often felt that her educators ostracized her from the school community and made her feel as if her pregnancy was her fault and a big misstep in her education, rather than supporting her to reach her postsecondary goals while trying to be a good mother. Despite Elena's career aspirations to start a nonprofit organization for women in the Global South, she worried that the way she was perceived by her educators—for being an Asian and Latina single teen mother—hindered her from gaining access to the information, resources, and guidance that she would need in order to go to college.

Amelia is Cambodian and Mexican and grew up in different cities throughout the greater Los Angeles area. With a contagious smile and bouncy ringlets framing her dark eyes, Amelia exuded joy whenever she entered the room. Her positive outlook and easygoing nature were built on years of hardship—experiencing housing insecurity, separation from her family, foster care, and sexual abuse. Through these numerous struggles, Amelia remained greatly inspired by what she saw as the sacrifices her mother made to move to the United States from Cambodia, to give her and her siblings a better life. She spoke about her siblings with deep affection, saying that her college and career goals revolved around her obligations to be a good role model for them. She aspired to relocate her family to a different city, to prevent her siblings from getting entangled in the violence associated with the city in which they lived. In school, she experienced some of the effects of being in a highly carceral community; she shared that she was suspended for defending herself and felt intimidated by the campus police officers who seemed to taunt her. Amelia believed that her educators saw her Asianness as a marker of her ability to defend herself and, at times, made her the presumed aggressor. Thus, she worried that she would not receive protection or the benefit of the doubt from her educators in the event she was the victim.

Data Collection

LGP data were collected between the 2015-2016 and 2018-2019 school years, with about six GoC per school (N=35). Students participated in sister circle (Giddings, 1984; Neal-Barnett et al., 2011; Williams et al., 2012) and kitchen table (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2011) focus group sessions, and completed reflective diagramming that included creative writing, mapping, and word association activities. Each session was videotaped and structured with three components:

1. A brief overview designed to provide participants with the background and a common language for the topic.
2. A diagramming activity that encouraged introspection and reflection.
3. Questions for collective discussion.

Various topics were discussed during each session, allowing for a more holistic understanding of their schooling and discipline experiences, identity, and perceptions of gendered racism.

Data Analysis

In this analysis, we employed found poetry along with an intersectional and Asian feminist framework to analyze and attend to the ways that Asian girls resisted stereotypes, especially during instances of punishment and exclusion. Guided by our frameworks, we developed codes that we then used for each participant's interview and diagramming data, which allowed us to capture a multidimensional and holistic view of their academic and lived experiences. This was followed by thematic analysis to delineate the identity construction of Asian girls with a particular focus on instances where they resisted expectations based on sexist anti-Asian stereotypes. We coded approximately 30 hours of interview data along with 60 diagramming activities. Finally, we arranged poetic representations that incorporated words and phrases contributed by each participant, and added some of our own words, informed by our lived experiences as Asian women, to facilitate the analysis.

Although the description of our inquiry process sounds rather linear, it was deeply iterative and reflexive as we moved back-and-forth and back-and-forth again while sifting through and understanding the data to shape, create, and re-create the poems. We read the interview transcripts out loud to help us to feel as the participants felt in their retold narratives, intuitively sorting words, phrases, sentences, and passages so we might feel more deeply interconnected with our participants. This process of sorting through data was "metaphorical, narrative, and affective" as we connected with participants to allow our affective responses to inform our analytic decisions (Prendergast, 2009, xxiii).

Sanchez individually created a poetic collage, paying close attention to words while creating a tree of life diagram with the participant's words. The process of poetic collage making enabled her mind and body to engage with participants and pushed her toward greater reflexivity (Sanchez & Brown, 2023). Similarly, Gu created poems while engaged in data analysis, living in the participants' retold narrative while creating, revising, re-creating, and re-revising multiple times. We then discussed and read the poems aloud to feel our way through as we revisited the participants' lives while also contemplating whether the poems represented their experiences accurately and artistically. This read-aloud practice was performative as it helped us pay attention to "the sense of voice" (Prendergast, 2009, xxiii). This iterative poetic inquiry process was reflexive, allowing us to engage with one another and ourselves (Pillow, 2003) to situate our identities within the analysis, which is an integral element to our critical arts-based approach.

Findings

"To be an Asian Girl"

Everywhere I go,
I'm expected
to be a good Asian girl—
to be quiet,
to be obedient,
to speak broken English.

They taunt me in "Chinese"; they call me "Cheena"
I will go off on you, don't play me
I make myself bigger, I seem like a angry little brown girl
If I don't, I'm going to be harassed
I'm going to be oppressed

(I ask you a question.
What if I fight back
against their hostility?
What if I raise my voice and
empower myself
as an Asian girl?)

I'm not willing to belittle myself to please somebody else
I am outspoken, loud, defiant,
they foolishly see me as a Karate expert—

That I can defend myself
Unlike supposedly helpless white girls.

(I ask you a question.
What if I am the victim?
What if I am suppressing myself,
with fear
and they try to make me seem like
the bad person?)

I was never so big on college—
that's for the rich kids.
My household wasn't the best—
we don't have a lot of money
Mom works seven days a week,
like ten hours on her feet.

Everywhere I go,
I'm expected to be a poor Asian girl—
to get pregnant,
to become a drop out,
to work at a fast-food restaurant.

If I am being dependable, responsible
with my own money,
it's still not good enough.
They still think I'm a dropout because
I'm late or hardly come to school.

(I ask you a question.
What if I work long hours
to make money,
to support my family,
to not have regrets?)

I get frustrated, mad, agitated.
But you know, I have a dream of
being the only female in my family
to graduate high school and college.
I want to show mom that she came to this
country for something.

In this found poetry, we represented participants' experiences using their words and expressions to amplify their voices, which are often silenced or not represented in research. The poem is based on Amelia, Noelle, and Elena's narratives, perspectives, and feelings— the similarities and differences therein. We wove the voices of the participants into one poetic representation to demonstrate and emphasize the convergence of their struggles with anti-Asian sexism, while also capturing their identity construction in relation to their experiences with school punishment. We acknowledge that it is important to nuance their individual experiences, particularly regarding their different ethnic backgrounds, to avoid essentializing them. We do not take this approach in our poem, however, as our findings strongly suggest that despite their different ethnicities and geographic locations, our participants shared significant experiences and perspectives around school punishment.

Our poem begins by addressing the gendered anti-Asian expectations that Asian girls be "quiet," "obedient," and "speak broken English." We found that the participants felt they only became visible to their educators when they did not conform to gendered, model-minority expectations, which made them uniquely vulnerable to punishment. This was further complicated for Asian girls, like Amelia and Elena, who were not always constructed as Asian because they did not phenotypically present the way Asian people are expected to look (i.e., aligned with east Asian physical attributes). For these girls, their Asianness was often wielded against them, marking them as a disappointment for failing to be a model minority (e.g., being a teen mom, fighting, defying/talking back to educators) and not being "Asian enough." Our poem illustrates the ways that the participants' perceptions of how their educators constructed their identity was centered around the status of perpetual foreigner and notions of docility associated with Asian femininity. As demonstrated in the second stanza, however, they not only defied these stereotypes, but also embraced their identity as Asian girls who stood up for themselves, made themselves "bigger," and asserted their agency so that they would not be "harassed" and "oppressed" as Elena said.

The fourth stanza continues to address the girls' resistance to conforming to sexist anti-Asian expectations. We included lines from Amelia's story about being suspended for defending herself against a classmate who hit her. As she recounted the incident, she imagined her educator would assume that she knew karate and could therefore defend herself while contrastingly stating that a white girl could not. In this instance, Amelia's relationship with school punishment was shaped by how her experiences and beliefs around how her educators constructed her Asian girl identity in relation to white femininity. Whereas a white girl needed protection, an Asian girl was presumed to be capable of protecting herself and may also be seen as the perpetrator. Assumptions of Asian girls/women being an aggressor are rooted in historical portrayals of them as villainous and mean (e.g., yellow peril, tiger mom). As a result of these sexist, anti-Asian stereotypes, Amelia worried that her educators automatically saw her as a "bad person," which was punctuated by her fear that

one day she might be a victim, but would not be believed, and instead be villainized, because of her identity.

Stanzas six to nine represent the social locations of participants as poor/working-class Asian girls from immigrant families. As presumed model minorities, Asian students are expected to be uniformly diligent, smart, and hard working. They are also often thought to be from the middle class and able to succeed in school with little support and resources; however, along with the hypervisibility of their Asian femininity, the participants' poor/working-class background and their role in their families would, at times, necessitate them working for supplemental income. For example, Noelle's need to get an after-school job to help ease her parents' financial burden and her tardiness were incongruent with the expectations that Asian students have perfect attendance and focus only on their studies. She claimed that she had been reprimanded by her educators for being unmotivated and that she had internalized the label of "lazy." What is especially troubling about Noelle's situation is that, rather than being made to feel like the responsible and mature teenager that she was (being able to work to support herself and her family while managing to go to school), she was led to believe that she had a character flaw. Noelle thought that being labeled as the model minority affected Asian students like her uniquely, saying "I feel like most of the Asians that need help don't actually get the help at all because of what they [society] expect from them."

We end the poem in a stanza that captures the collective sentiments of frustration, hope, and ambition as expressed by the girls in our study. All three of the participants were dejected and angered by the constant anti-Asian sexist microaggressions, bullying, and treatment from members of their school community, low expectations from their educators, and lack of opportunities to pursue their postsecondary ambitions. Despite this, however, they maintained a positive sense of their identity, appreciated their abilities and strengths, and remained hopeful about their futures. They also continued to work hard to actualize their goals, which largely revolved around caring for their family and ensuring that they lived up to the hard work of their immigrant parents. The Asian girls in this study held high aspirations professionally and personally; they dreamed of a life where they would be financially stable, mentally and emotionally healthy, surrounded by love, and contributing to making society better for future generations.

Discussion

Through found poetry, this article explored the identity construction of three Asian girls who defied gendered anti-Asian stereotypes and experienced school punishment. Our findings show that Asian girls in the United States, especially those from low socio-economic backgrounds, suffer at the intersection of classism, sexism, racism, and xenophobia while

working to obtain a quality education. Anti-Asian tropes, such as MMM and perpetual foreigner, contribute to Asian girls being uniquely punished, especially when they do not align themselves as model minorities. In response, our participants used their agency to assert themselves as outspoken, bold, and capable, disrupting common sexist, anti-Asian beliefs about them. This article contributes to further expanding the landscape of education research for and about Asian girls from poor-/working-class families; the focus on punishment is timely given the current sociopolitical contexts of gendered anti-Asian violence and harm. Finally, this analysis contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the Asian diaspora in the United States—one that is large, diverse, and complex.

Authors' Note

To protect the privacy of participants, all school and student names used throughout this article are pseudonyms.

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