

ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS RECONCILIATION: THE NEGOTIATION OF IDENTITIES AMONG SECOND-GENERATION ASIAN-AMERICAN CHRISTIANS

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on ethnic and religious identities of second-generation Asian-American Christian students. It explains why increasingly large numbers of these students participate in on-campus Christian ministries. Building upon previously used research models, the study adds novel methodological dimensions to the study of second-generation Asian-American religiosity. It draws on survey and interview data to compare Asian-Americans in multi-ethnic and ethnic-specific on-campus ministries, and examines how students negotiate their ethnic and religious identities differently in each type of group. The study produces three major findings. First, second-generation Asian-American Christian students join on-campus Christian ministries for fellowship and community. Students in ethnic-specific ministries define fellowship and community in terms of ethnic relations, while those in multi-ethnic ministries emphasize spiritual ties. Second, comfort plays a significant role in whether or not a student joins a multi-ethnic or ethnic-specific ministry. Students in multi-ethnic ministries say they would be more comfortable worshipping in an ethnic-specific setting but, for spiritual reasons, join multi-ethnic ministries. Finally, I show that second-generation Asian-American students join on-campus Christian ministries in an attempt to separate themselves from the foreign aspects of their ethnic identity and to become more American.

INTRODUCTION

Second-generation Asian-Americans bridge two worlds: the traditional Asian world of their immigrant parents and the modern American one in which they live. Because of this position, they possess a unique ethnic identity, one that is not quite Asian and not yet American. As law professor Frank Wu (2002) argues, this identity is shaped by how society views Asian-Americans; their social position is tenuous because they suffer from a "perpetual foreigner" label that assumes they are not U. S. citizens, but loyalists of whatever Asian nation to which they trace their roots. The label strips away the American status of Asian-Americans, rendering them unable adequately to assimilate into U. S. culture. How do Asian-Americans compensate for this difficulty? This paper examines one mechanism for doing so: participation in religious groups.

Along with factors such as scholastic achievement, family acculturation, and English proficiency (Portes and Rumbaut 2001), religion is a marker of assimilation. Portes (2006) argues that immigrants use religion as a mechanism for assimilation into U. S. culture, but also as a means of ethnic reinforcement, since they meet co-ethnics and form social bonds in church. In contrast to their first-generation parents, second-generation Asian-Americans use religion to negotiate the foreign, ethnic aspects of their identity with the American aspects of their identity.

One place where we can see these processes in action is on college campuses. Asian-Americans account for only about 5% of the United States population, yet they are over-represented in colleges and universities nationwide (Asian-American Studies Center at UCLA 2006). The steady growth in Asian-American enrollment over the last 20 years is paralleled by surging Asian-American participation in on-campus Christian ministries such as the InterVarsity

Christian Fellowship (IVCF). On some West Coast and Northeast college campuses, enrollment of Asian-Americans in IVCF chapters is as high as 80% (Kim 2004). For example, chapters at Stanford and the University of California at Berkeley are almost completely Asian-American (Stafford 2006). Many students even join ethnic-specific ministries on-campus such as the Korean Christian Fellowship and the Chinese Christian Fellowship (Busto 1996).

Based on these statistics and the work of Wu (2002) and Portes (2006), I ask two questions: why do second-generation Asian-Americans join on-campus Christian ministries? And, how do they negotiate their ethnic and religious identities within these groups?

LITERATURE REVIEW

In his work on Asian-American Christians, Busto (1996) argues that they relegate their ethnicity as secondary to their religious identity. In turn, this religious identity affirms their ethnic identity. His interview subjects report that their Christian identity reinforces traditional Asian values of family, work, and education. From these testimonials, he posits that on-campus Christian groups reinforce the idea of the model minority, which Takaki (1998) describes as the stereotypical image of successful Asian-Americans. With its strong moral values and emphasis on work ethic, evangelicalism reinforces this stereotype. As such, campus ministries shelter Asian-Americans from anti-Asian sentiment aimed at them because of their perceived academic competition. Busto (1996) concludes that religious ideology and culture can protect stigmatized minorities from prejudice and stereotypes. Where Christianity is dominant, Asian-American Christians may be considered less foreign and more American by others.

Alumkal (2004) enhances Busto's (1996) arguments by integrating racial formation theory and the idea of racial reconciliation into his study of on-campus Christian ministries. Racial formation theory argues that race is created and defined by a society, and that there is a "racial hegemony" in which the dominant group actively resists political, social, and economic equality in subtle ways (Omi and Winant 1994). In contrast, racial reconciliation suggests that "through the common lordship of Christ reconciliation between the races [is] possible" (Alumkal 2004: 198). In other words, racial problems would be mitigated if people could unite under a common Christian identity. In U. S. racial hegemony, racial reconciliation is played out in campus ministries. Non-Asian students resent the presence of Asian-Americans, who are seen as bringing unwelcome academic competition. In this environment, Asian-Americans may be drawn to fellowships that proclaim "all are one in Christ" and offer a haven from racial antagonism.

Existing studies on Korean American campus ministries support this idea. In her case study of an on-campus Christian ministry in New York City, Park (2004) finds that second-generation Korean Americans form separate ministries on college campuses in which they redefine the Christianity of their first-generation parents, essentially erasing aspects of ethnicity from religion. This gives them control over their religious identity, unlike the ethnic identity which is ascribed to them, reducing the gap between their religious and ethnic identities. She sees this phenomenon as an effort to unite aspects of Korean culture with aspects of American culture, creating a unique dual identity that negotiates both cultures but still emphasizes their American origin. Kim (2004b) explores this duality in her case study of a Korean American on-campus Christian ministry in California. She finds that students participate in ministries where they can be with co-ethnics who understand their cultural background and norms. They justify forming separate ethnic-specific ministries by citing inherent human weaknesses and stating that divine intervention will help them unite the races. These students want to be part of the majority and to avoid ethnic discrimination. They have more opportunities to participate in separate ethnic-specific ministries because of the growing number of Asian-Americans on campus, and choose ministries with members similar to themselves (the principle of homophily). Thus, membership in campus ministries allows second generation Asian-Americans a chance to adopt an alternative identity which is not tied to the negative affects of being a model minority. Kim (2004a) also argues that second-generation Asian-Americans reject the congregations of their first-generation parents, seeing them as ethnic enclaves rather than spiritual centers.

In sum, the literature shows that religion is a mechanism used by second-generation Asian-Americans to eliminate the foreign aspects of their identities in an effort to become more Americanized. At the same time, ethnic-specific ministries provide a place for ethnic solidarity and allow students to preserve certain aspects of their ethnic culture in the context of religion; a place where both ethnic and religious identities are balanced. However, this literature focuses only on ethnic-specific ministries. We know much less about multi-ethnic ministries and the social tools they provide to their Asian American and non-Asian American members.

METHODS AND DATA

My study seeks to address this gap in the literature. To enable comparisons, I mimicked the methods of similar research in the literature on-campus Christian ministries. Like Kim (2004) and Park (2004), I conducted in-depth personal interviews with students participating in on-campus ministries. However, my study adds three unique methodological elements. First, I used an electronic survey as the primary means of data collection in order to enable trend analysis. Second, both multi-ethnic and ethnic-specific ministries were sampled. Third, both Asian-Americans and non-Asian Americans were sampled, to allow for comparative analyses on several variables.

In this study, I sampled 11 campus ministries from 4 undergraduate institutions in New Jersey (all names have been changed). Each of the institutions is structurally distinct (see Table 1). Two are primarily undergraduate institutions with small populations: “North College” which is public, and “South University” which is private. “East University” is a private institution with a large population. “West University” is a public institution with a very large population. A mix of non-ethnic-specific and ethnic-specific ministries was chosen at each institution for the study. I surveyed and interviewed both Asian-American and Non-Asian-American participants to enable comparisons. I also gathered information on these ministries and the students who participate in them by observing one weekly meeting. A summary of this information is presented in Table 2.

TABLE 1
Fall 2005 Data on Colleges and Universities Sampled In This Study

	Total Undergraduate Population	Total Asian Pacific Islander American Population	% of Asian Pacific Islander American Population	# of On-campus Christian Ministries
North College	5,708	283	5%	5
South University	3,553	107	3%	3
East University	4,678	609	13%	15
West University	24,416	5,512	23%	29

TABLE 2
Description of On-Campus Christian Ministries

	Approx. Size*	Multi-ethnic or Ethnic-specific	Denominational or Nondenominational	Primary Ethnic Composition	# of Meetings Per Week
North College					
IVCF	Large	Multi-ethnic	Nondenominational	White, with sizeable AA** population	1
PBF	Small	Multi-ethnic	Denominational	White	1
CCM	Large	Multi-ethnic	Denominational	White	1
South University					
PCM	Small	Multi-ethnic	Denominational	White. Very few minorities in general	1
IVCF	Small	Multi-ethnic	Nondenominational	White, with sizeable minority population	1
East University					
EEF	Medium	Multi-ethnic	Nondenominational	White, with sizeable APA population.	1
Manna	Medium	Ethnic-specific	Nondenominational	AA, with few Whites	1
West University					
CCF	Large	Ethnic-specific	Nondenominational	AA, with few Whites	1
KCF	Large	Ethnic-specific	Nondenominational	AA, with few Whites	1
IVCF	Small	Multi-ethnic	Nondenominational	Equal mix of ethnicities	1
CCC	Medium	Multi-ethnic	Nondenominational	White, with sizeable AA population.	1

* Small = 1-40 regular members; Medium = 41-60 regular members; Large = 61+ regular members

** AA = Asian-American

TABLE 3
Institutions, Ministries, and Response Rate of Subjects

	North College			South University		East University		West University			
	IVCF	PBF	CCM	PCM	IVCF	EEF	Manna	CCF	KCF	IVCF	CCC
# of Attendees*	70	20	5	8	6	55	70	100+	50	21	40
# of Consent forms	41	18	5	7	6	20	25	12	12	18	16
# of Respondents	37	14	5	4	4	14	19	11	9	15	12
% of Attendees Volunteering to Participate	59%	90%	100%	88%	100%	36%	36%	12%	24%	86%	40%
% of Attendees Completing the Survey	53%	70%	100%	50%	67%	25%	27%	11%	18%	75%	30%
% of Volunteers Completing the Survey	90%	78%	100%	57%	67%	70%	76%	92%	75%	83%	75%

*# of attendees present at one meeting that I observed

To recruit subjects for my study, I contacted student leaders and faculty advisors of each ministry and I arranged a time to attend a general meeting. At each meeting, I briefly presented my research project and asked for volunteers to complete my survey. Willing participants were given a consent form to be read and completed at the meeting. They were also asked to provide me with their e-mail address so that the survey could be sent electronically to them. Table 3 reports the response rate for the subjects in each ministry.

The survey was developed using Survey Monkey, a survey-generating tool on the Internet and included multiple-choice, fill-in-the-black, and open-ended questions. Several questions were reproduced from major studies in the literature and the General Social Survey. To enable ready comparisons, demographic data and other pertinent questions relating to religion and ethnicity were included. All respondents received the same set of multiple-choice or open-ended questions. The respondents who identified themselves as Asian-American received an additional set of questions, such as, "Which is your primary identity?" At the end of the survey, participants were asked whether or not they would be willing to participate in a thirty- to sixty-minute recorded personal interview. If the participant agreed, he or she was prompted to provide his or her contact information. Open-ended interview questions were reproduced from major studies in the literature. In total, I selected 10 students from the pool of volunteers best to represent the diversity of my sample.

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Data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and Atlas-TI to enable comparisons and seek patterns in the data. I categorized respondents who identified themselves as U. S. citizens and as Asian as "Asian_American" I treated all other ethnicities as "Non-Asian-American." I then recoded the ministry variable to indicate if the group was either multi-ethnic or ethnic-specific. Using cross-tabulations, I assessed the statistical significance of differences between variables. I compared the responses of Asian-Americans to non-Asian Americans, then the responses of Asian-American students from different institutions to assess whether or not the institution itself had an effect on the attitudes and beliefs of the respondents. I also compared the responses of Asian-American students in multi-ethnic ministries to those in ethnic-specific groups. Finally, I thematically organized and analyzed open-ended responses on the survey and interview transcripts using the Atlas TI program, employing a comparative approach similar to the one used in the quantitative analysis.

In sum, I believe my research methods are particularly strong because of several distinguishing factors. I sampled several campuses and 11 organizations and surveyed a total of 124 individual respondents. I had 49 interview volunteers, of which 10 were carefully selected as representative of the diverse survey sample. Thus, my study sample was significantly larger than those of other scholars. As a Chinese-American college senior, I was able to establish rapport with student subjects, and this lends to the validity of my findings. In addition to the same type of personal interviews and participant observation employed by other researchers, I conducted a survey which allowed me to assess significant trends and patterns. I collected data from non-Asian-Americans and students in multi-ethnic ministries, in addition to data on Asian-Americans and ethnic-specific ministries. This data makes comparative analyses possible and opens the door to further investigations into Asian-American religiosity.

FINDINGS

My data analysis revealed three themes: fellowship and community, comfort versus discomfort, and assimilation and dissociation. After presenting a brief demographic profile of the respondents, I examine each theme with particular attention to the questions posed by my study.

TABLE 4
Demographic Profile of Survey Participants

	# of AA* Participants	% of AA Participants	# of Non-AA Participants	% of Non-AA Participants	Total # of Participants
North College					
ICVF	8	22%	29	78%	37
PBF	1	7%	13	93%	14
CCM	0	0%	5	100%	5
South University					
PCM	0	0%	4	100%	4
IVCF	0	0%	4	100%	4
East University					
EEF	3	21%	11	79%	14
Gateway	17	89%	2	11%	19
West University					
CCF	10	91%	1	9%	11
KCF	9	100%	0	0%	9
IVCF	5	33%	10	67%	15
CCC	2	17%	10	83%	12
Total	55	--	89	--	144

*AA = Asian-American

TABLE 5
Demographic Profile of Interview Subjects

Name	School	Ethnicity	Ministry
Jennifer Lee	North College	Asian-American	IVCF
Jeffrey Jones	North College	Non-Asian-American	IVCF
Jessica Lenard	North College	Non-Asian-American	PBF
Anna Smith	South University	Non-Asian-American	PCM
Karen Steadman	East University	Non-Asian-American	EEF
John Chan	East University	Asian-American	EEF
Donald Loo	West University	Asian-American	CCF
Maya Chan	West University	Asian-American	IVCF
Peter White	West University	Non-Asian-American	CCC
Linda Yu	West University	Asian-American	CCC

A demographic profile of students in each ministry is presented in Table 4. In my survey, Asian-Americans included Americans of East Asian, South Asian, Southeast Asian, and Pacific Islander descent. Non-Asian-Americans constituted white, black, and Hispanic ethnicities. The vast majority of non-Asian-Americans across all ministries was white. The majority, 47% of the Asian-American respondents, came from West University. The majority, 53% of non-Asian-American respondents, came from North College. Across all institutions, there were 36 Asian-Americans (65%) who participated in ethnic-specific ministries and 19 (35%) who did not. Table 5 reports the demographic information of the 10 selected interview subjects.

FELLOWSHIP AND COMMUNITY

I find that there are two basic reasons for joining: fellowship and community. Non-Asian-American Christian students and second-generation Asian-American Christians in multi-ethnic ministries are drawn into on-campus ministries by the need for spiritual fellowship and growth. However, second-generation Asian-American Christians in ethnic-specific ministries are drawn into ministries by social ties, including family, ethnic-specific churches at home, and friends.

The vast majority--83.9%--of Asian-Americans in ethnic-specific ministries say they have mostly Asian-American friends, whereas people in multi-ethnic ministries do not. Moreover, many Asian-Americans at East and West Universities explain that their Asian-American friends urge them to join ethnic-specific ministries. Consequently, ethnic-specific organizations are able to recruit and retain new members because of the social ties among Asian-Americans.

The qualitative data reflect this social phenomenon. For example, one open-ended question on the survey asks, "Why did you join this ministry/organization?" Eighty-three percent of Asian-Americans in ethnic-specific ministries surveyed gave answers that included references to social ties that bind them to that organization. For example, the following quotation is typical: "My brother is in it, and many people from my home church also told me to join" (Chinese American female, age 18, West University CCF.) This response shows that students knew others in the organization and were drawn into the group because of these ties. Another open-ended question on the survey asks, "Why did you choose an ethnic-specific ministry/organization over a multi-ethnic ministry?" In 31 of 36 responses, social ties were the main reason people joined ethnic-specific ministries: "Upon entering college, the only organization that I had heard of was KCF. This was suggested to me by a former president of KCF, so I decided to check it out" (Korean American female, age 19, West University KCF). "I attended an ethnic-specific ministry before college and a number of students from my church, attended this ministry/organization. I went with what I knew, it was easier because I didn't have to go through meeting all these new

people" (Chinese American female, age 18, West University CCF).

Asian-Americans who join ethnic-specific ministries initially do so because they know somebody in them, or because people in their ethnic-specific church encourage them. In an interview, Donald Loo (all names are pseudonyms), a 20-year-old Chinese American male in West University CCF, emphasizes the social aspect of ethnic-specific ministries:

Donald: Yeah...there's this stereotype that there's this type of person who goes to church just to meet girls or meet guys, so I think a lot of people might go for social reasons.

Dennis: Do you see a lot of that in CCF?

Donald: I do a little bit. A little bit more than I'd like to...I guess they want to see more Asian people.

Donald's words support the notion that Asian-Americans attend ethnic-specific ministries for social reasons, in this case, for the chance to meet members of the opposite sex. He suggests that Asian-Americans naturally desire to socialize with other Asian-Americans. Maya Chan, an 18-year-old Chinese American female from West University IVCF, adds to this idea:

Maya: I feel like maybe the Asians that are already in the fellowships, mostly their friends are Asian so... they bring their Asian friends.

Dennis: So you're saying that they feel more comfortable with other Asian-Americans as well?

Maya: Or maybe their friends are just mostly Asian...like most of my friends are just Asian. Because I think...we don't think about it. But we tend to gravitate towards people like us...so maybe there are more Asian people [in ethnic-specific ministries] because you want to bring your friends who are not Christian.

Although Maya does not attend an ethnic-specific ministry, her response supports the idea that Asian-Americans attend these ministries not just because of social ties in the organization, but also for the desire for fellowship, community, and interactions with other Asian-Americans.

This ethnic draw is unique to Asian-Americans attending ethnic-specific ministries: the responses of non-Asian-Americans and Asian-Americans in multi-ethnic ministries were remarkably similar. In open-ended and interview responses, most non-Asian-Americans and Asian-Americans in multi-ethnic ministries cite religious reasons for joining their ministries. When asked, "Why did you join this ministry/organization?" 67% of non-Asian American respondents and 68% of Asian-American students in multi-ethnic ministries declared religious reasons for joining. The following responses are typical:

Because I desired to have a fellowship on campus that offered solid Biblical teaching and a good staff support network while interacting with other committed Christians

--White male, age 19, East University EEf

My faith in Jesus Christ is very important to me and I knew that coming to college I wanted to find other people who would support my faith and help increase my understanding of Christianity. I believe that God wants us to [have] fellowship with other Christians to build each other up and encourage one another.

--Chinese American female, age 20, North College IVCF

While they are dissimilar in their gender, race, ethnicity, school, and organization, these two students respond in similar ways: they joined multi-ethnic ministries for spiritual development and growth. According to these students, a spiritual attraction prompted them to seek fellowship with other committed Christians and a place where they could develop their relationship with God. These students rarely focused on social ties in the organization, and none stated a desire to interact with co-ethnics. Instead, they claimed to look for organizations with solid Christian values, sound religious teaching, and a network of other devout Christians.

The interview data yields more insights into this phenomenon. When I asked him if he would prefer joining an ethnic-specific group if he had the choice, John Chan told me that being in a multi-ethnic ministry and worshipping alongside all people is more indicative of God's wish:

I personally would stick with the multi-ethnic one. I think it's more representative of God's body. And, I think it also takes the cultural factor out of your religious faith

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experience. I mean I can see the need for ethnic-specific ones because for example, with Gateway, there might be a lot of people who go who are not professing Christians but they go to Gateway because a lot of their friends do and it's an environment where like they're there...if Gateway didn't exist, a lot of these non-professing Christians who go because their friends go, might not go to any fellowship.

--John Chan, 19 year-old Chinese American male at East University EEF

John's tone is negative when he talks about non-professing Christians in ethnic-specific settings who participate for social reasons, and he thinks that multi-ethnic ministry follows God's wishes. He believes that ethnic-specific ministries are social hubs rather than spiritual centers. The observation emphasizes the erasure of culture in a multi-ethnic ministry, because John's Asian-American ethnicity is not a factor. He suggests that ethnic culture binds Asian-Americans together and ties them to churches through extended social networks. John views this connection as inessential to the worship of God. To him, ethnicity and the desire to interact with co-ethnics is secondary to the religious experience of the ministry. Other Asian American students in multi-ethnic ministries concurred.

In sum, the need for fellowship and community drives Asian-Americans and non-Asian-Americans to join on-campus Christian ministries. Yet, the manner in which these two groups define fellowship and community are distinct. Both non-Asian-Americans and Asian-Americans in multi-ethnic ministries regard *fellowship* as spiritual and *community* as a group of students who share a relationship with God. Moreover, Asian-Americans in multi-ethnic ministries have reservations about ethnic ministries, saying those ministries are not indicative of God's vision. On the other hand, Asian Americans in ethnic-specific ministries define *fellowship* and *community* as social ties that bind them to the organization and cite the desire to interact with co-ethnics. Religious and spiritual growth are noticeably absent from their reasons for joining on-campus Christian ministries.

COMFORT VERSUS DISCOMFORT

Comfort permeates the language in the open-ended responses and interview data. The survey data show that the presence of co-ethnics has an effect on the level of comfort of Asian-Americans in all ministries. Most second-generation Asian-American students say they are most comfortable worshipping with other Asian-Americans in an ethnic-specific ministry. I also find differences among non-Asian-Americans and Asian-Americans in multi-ethnic settings, and Asian-Americans in ethnic-specific settings. Each group negotiates comfort in different ways.

Most non-Asian-Americans describe the initial discomfort associated with joining a group. Despite feeling initial discomfort, non-Asian-Americans eventually feel welcomed:

I did [feel uncomfortable] in the beginning when I was a freshman, but that's normal. I think because everybody knew each other so well...I was like the odd man out...I don't think anybody says anything here that would make anybody not want to come back.

--Anna Smith, white American female, age 21, South University PBF

This response is typical of most non-Asian-American respondents. They feel uncomfortable being the new person in a group of students who already know each other. This discomfort, however, fades away as they are quickly integrated into the ministry.

Non-Asian-Americans also spoke about the discomfort associated with being Christian at secular institutions. Most said they chose to attend a secular institution in order to grow in their faith and challenge their perceptions and beliefs. Karen Steadman, a 21-year-old female from East University EEF, talks about this challenge and her choice:

Karen: Your faith will be tested and I think you come across a lot of stuff in classrooms that you don't...probably wouldn't agree with...or just philosophies and world views that influence everything that's said...I mean, I was home-schooled all my life. And, I just really felt like I had been well-prepared, well-grounded in a Christian education. And I just felt like going to a Christian college would not use the skills that I had. I felt like I

could handle a secular university. I was like, OK, let's be in the world. Let it BE in the classroom.

After her strict Christian upbringing at home, Karen felt that she could confront challenges to her faith in an environment that reflects the diversity of America. But many students said they were uncomfortable with secular views of Christianity, not solely in the classroom, but also in the general atmosphere of the secular campus. West University student Peter White explained:

Well there's been some things at the [school] newspaper; there's been things...about Christians and...there seems to be some conflict between certain groups...the paper, general world-view of the school and the people at the school towards Christians isn't too favorable. So there isn't much acceptance.

--Peter White, White American male, age 22, West University CCC

Given their perceptions that the campus is hostile to their beliefs, non-Asian-American students find comfort and strength in their relationship with God and fellowship in on-campus Christian ministries. Despite the challenges that Karen faced in the classroom and the constant intimidation by publications at Peter's school, these students find comfort with other Christians. Yet, noticeably absent from their responses are feelings of discomfort based on race or ethnicity.

Asian-Americans in multi-ethnic ministries also draw comfort and strength from the Christian fellowship available in these organizations. According to the survey data, 55.6% of Asian-Americans in multi-ethnic ministries say they feel comfortable in a multi-ethnic setting. However, in interview data, Asian-American students allude to initial discomfort related to their ethnicity. For example, Jennifer Lee, a 21-year-old Korean American female in North College IVCF, talks about this initial discomfort:

Dennis: Would you feel more or less comfortable or the same if there were more Asian-Americans in InterVarsity?

Jennifer: Yes, I thought about that a lot. The people that I first made connections with in InterVarsity were Chinese Americans...but I think initially as I came in as a freshman, I would've been more comfortable [with IVCF] because the campus has a lower percentage of Asian-American minorities. I would've felt more comfortable initially.

In contrast to non-Asian-Americans, Jennifer's initial discomfort is based on her ethnic identity, rather than stemming from being the new person in the group. She then talks about overcoming this initial discomfort and her decision to remain in a multi-ethnic fellowship:

I usually go with the thought that if I'm uncomfortable in a setting or if I don't feel that I fit in, not that I would change myself, but I will overcome those uncomfortable and awkward parts to become part of the fellowship instead of trying to figure something out and try to create my own ethnic-specific fellowship.

In this response, Jennifer openly acknowledges her discomfort in a multi-ethnic ministry, but she challenges these feelings by remaining in the group. Moreover, she justifies her attendance at a multi-ethnic ministry rather than an ethnic-specific with spiritual and personal reasoning:

It's better to be multi-ethnic than just ethnic-specific because I guess Christians have a view that we're all in one family and if we break ourselves up...it wouldn't represent what it means to be a true Christian...It would actually limit the experience to be in an ethnic-specific one, especially since we live in America which is multi-ethnic, and purposefully to join somewhere else that is specific...I would honestly have felt either bored or just not stimulated enough...I want to know what it feels like to be uncomfortable and know that the world is not just about what I'm comfortable with and what I want.

With these responses, Jennifer eschews her ethnicity and views herself primarily as a Christian and part of "one family." Despite her ethnicity and her comfort among co-ethnics, Jennifer worships in a setting that she sees as more indicative of Christian multi-ethnic values. She equates these values with the American experience, and is willing to challenge her feelings of discomfort to immerse herself in that experience. Essentially, ethnic difference is not a substantial obstacle for spiritual fellowship, and Jennifer's relationship with God and her desire to remain in

a multi-ethnic ministry overcomes feelings of discomfort based on her ethnicity.

In contrast to Asian-American students like Jennifer, those in ethnic-specific ministries have a larger investment in their ethnicity. The majority of students in ethnic-specific ministries (83.9%) say they have more Asian-American friends, and 48.4% say they are more comfortable in an ethnic-specific setting. When asked, "Why did you choose an ethnic-specific ministry or organization over a multi-ethnic one?" 83% of Asian-Americans who responded mentioned ethnicity and comfort. The following comment is typical: "I chose the ethnic-specific ministry over a multi-ethnic one because I felt (and feel) more comfortable with people of the same ethnicity" (Korean American female, age 20, West University KCF). Moreover, when asked, "What are the benefits of participating in an ethnic-specific ministry?" 89% of Asian Americans in ethnic-specific ministries again mentioned comfort with co-ethnics. As a Korean American female, age 18, from West University KCF noted: "There is that common bond of the physical identity that is the same as well as the culture. It makes it easier building relationships since we have a general feeling of where each person is coming from based on the similar ethnic culture. Plus we can relate to each other better and easier." Asian-Americans in ethnic-specific ministries say they are more comfortable with other Asian-Americans because of shared cultural background. They share common experiences at home and in school and thus, are more inclined to socialize with each other. Because of their unique yet shared experience, many second-generation Asian-American students join ethnic-specific groups.

In sum, ethnicity plays a large role in religiosity for Asian -Americans in ethnic-specific ministries. Respondents said they felt comfortable bonding with co-ethnics based on cultural and generational similarities. The ethnic-specific ministry, it seems, is an avenue through which ethnicity and religiosity reinforce each other. In other words, common bonds among second-generation Asian-Americans support their participation in these ministries. Because of their shared background, Asian-Americans are more comfortable worshipping together. They combine cultural ties and Christian fellowship in an attempt to feel accepted by their peers, even as they embrace the encompassing identity of being Christian in America.

ASSIMILATION AND DISSOCIATION

In my survey analysis, I found almost no statistical differences between Asian-Americans and non-Asian-Americans across all institutions and within each institution. Survey responses on topics correlated with religiosity – such as political orientation, gender roles, and theological debates – revealed no statistical differences. These responses suggest that assimilation through religious homogenization is taking place. The view of Asian-Americans as perpetual foreigners (Wu 2002) is lessened as the religious beliefs and practices of Asian-Americans parallel those of more Americanized ethnic groups, particularly white ethnicities. Moreover, the survey questions posed only to Asian-Americans revealed that most believe that American society has neutral feelings towards Asian-Americans. Even more telling is that most Asian-Americans indicate that their Christian identity is primary to their ethnic identity. This implies that Asian-American ethnicity, and the stigma attached to it, is not as salient as religious identity for Asian-American Christians.

However, in follow-up interviews, Asian-American respondents talked about ethnic intimidation and prejudice, so the perceived predominance of religious identity may obscure the salience of ethnic identity. What is particularly interesting is that respondents claimed that ethnic differences became less important when they embraced Christianity and became involved in a Christian fellowship. By joining a religious group, Asian-Americans become less Asian and more American. They adopt a Christian identity, one that reflects the U. S. majority. John Chan talks about this ethnic and religious interplay:

I would say in high school I noticed a lot more my Asian-American heritage because...we didn't have a religious organization. So, my cultural identity became a lot more prevalent. Um, here at East, I would say the majority of my friends are Christian. And I feel at East, people don't really notice your race or cultural identity as much. It's

more about the kind of things you're involved in and stuff.

--John Chan, Chinese American, age 19, East University EEF

When John went to college and joined a Christian ministry, he no longer felt the stigma attached to being Asian-American. The ministry thus acts as a haven against racial antagonism, helps to eliminate John's ethnic differences, and introduces him to a body of friends.

An interview with Jennifer Lee of North College IVCF adds some interesting insights: I think the thing with me is for a while I used to deny the fact that I was Korean...cause for a while I used to think that in America feeling [and] knowing that I'm in the minority, [that] my image is not valued...I'm just on the outskirts of the mainstream so I always felt insecure about many things. I guess being a Christian, I just felt that in America it's more accepted and...it's definitely bigger than what I am and just felt that being part of that bigger thing, Christianity, was a way to uplift myself from the insecurities I had cause I felt that the Korean immigrant community that I live in they weren't looked upon very respectfully...I guess once I confronted my insecurities and really thought things through and looked internally, I realized that even when I began to embrace who I was and where I came from and my heritage, that Christianity does come first to me as an identity because it is my belief and that defines my life...and I guess gives direction to my life so that's how I'm able to define myself as a Christian first then [as] an Asian American.

In her response, Jennifer shows that her marginalized status is relieved through Christianity. Her experiences as a Korean-American are frustrating, but embracing Christianity makes her feel part of the majority and makes her feel wanted, not like the frustrated, unwanted, foreign minority that she describes in her response. The importance she places on her Christian identity allows her to downplay ethnic differences, look past racial antagonism, and thus, become more American.

Moreover, Asian-Americans in all ministries express dissatisfaction with the religiosity of their immigrant parents. In the qualitative data, respondents talked about the failure of their home church to address the needs of their generation. This pattern suggests rejection of the immigrant church as another mechanism to separate second-generation Asian-Americans further from the foreigner status of their immigrant parents. When asked, "How does your on-campus ministry or organization differ from the ethnic-specific church of your parent(s) or guardian(s)?" 65% of Asian Americans provide responses that point to intergenerational conflict. As a Korean American male, age 19, from West University KCF remarked: "It is more open to other groups of people and it doesn't concentrate as much on the culture and its ethnic traditions. The on-campus ministry is more about the aspect of fellowship regardless of the ethnic traditions." This response reflects the intergenerational conflict among Asian-Americans. On-campus ethnic-specific ministries cater mostly to the second generation and are more Americanized in their services and activities. Ethnic elements are noticeably absent in on-campus Christian meetings, even in ethnic-specific ministries. Donald Loo of West University CCF elaborates on his more Americanized identity and how he perceives it:

My parents sometimes tell me stories about [Asian] history ...I think that being Asian-American is more like a mix. You're still not, you're not exactly American but you're not exactly Asian either because like that you still have some of those traditions that you've grown up with that fostered you while you were young, but you also have a lot of influences from your environment.

Donald separates himself from his Asian immigrant parents to establish an American identity. Later, when I asked how his ministry reinforces his position as an Asian-American, Donald said it makes him feel "more Asian-American less Asian. It's more like... [a] group... even with Chinese you have Cantonese, Taiwanese...we have Korean people coming. [The ethnic differences] are not something that they really emphasize that much." Donald emphasizes pan-ethnicity, a phenomenon indicative of the second generation: the immigrant generation is fractured by several sub-ethnic groups, but the second generation adopts the pan-ethnic label "Asian-American" to signify their position in American society; they are not immigrants but

rather are Americans who happen to be Asian. Like other students, Donald emphasizes the differences between his experience and that of his immigrant parents; his American identity is reinforced through his participation in an on-campus Christian ministry.

Thus, second-generation Asian-American Christians embrace on-campus Christian ministries in order to alleviate the foreign implications of their ethnic identity. They reject the church of their immigrant parents and embrace the more Americanized on-campus Christian ministries to assimilate into American culture and to eliminate the ethnic differences within their community. Asian-Americans in both multi-ethnic and ethnic-specific ministries negotiate these dissociation and assimilation mechanisms in similar ways.

DISCUSSION

In this study, I explore why many second-generation Asian-Americans are joining on-campus Christian organizations, particularly ethnic-specific ministries. By comparing non-Asian-Americans and Asian Americans in multi-ethnic ministries, I find that both join on-campus Christian ministries for spiritual and religious fellowship, whereas Asian Americans in ethnic-specific ministries join the organization because of social ties and the desire for a co-ethnic community. I also find that although Asian-Americans in both multi-ethnic and ethnic-specific ministries are more comfortable worshipping alongside other Asian-Americans, those in multi-ethnic ministries are more willing to forego this comfort and worship in a multi-ethnic ministry. Finally, I find that in addition to spiritual fulfillment, Asian-Americans in both types of ministries use religion to separate themselves from the foreign aspects of their ethnic identity and create a new identity that is uniquely American.

My findings support the existing literature on second-generation Asian-American religiosity. Like Busto (1996), I find that ethnic identity is relegated to a secondary status compared to religious identity by second-generation Asian-Americans, who downplay their ethnicity and emphasize their Christian identity. My interviews support Alumkal's (2004) arguments that Christianity provides a safe haven against racial antagonism for Asian-Americans. My study also supports Kim's (2004) and Park's (2004) work on the balance of ethnic and religious identity among second-generation Asian-American Christians. Like these authors, I find that ethnic-specific ministries are a place for students to forge their own identity as Asian-Americans, an identity that is separate from their immigrant parents and is essentially American.

However, my study also adds to the existing literature on second-generation Asian-American religiosity by incorporating quantitative and comparative data that not only reveal the beliefs and attitudes of Asian Americans, but also compare them to those of non-Asian-Americans. I demonstrate that both non-Asian-Americans and Asian-Americans in multi-ethnic ministries share similar religious and spiritual beliefs. Moreover, I show that they often are similar in their responses to most of the questions posed in the surveys and interview. These similarities between Asian-Americans and non-Asian-Americans reflect the assimilation of Asian-Americans into American culture by means of religion. However, the experiences of Asian-Americans in multi-ethnic ministries are markedly different from those of Asian-Americans in ethnic-specific ministries. Choice of ministry – ethnic-specific or multi-ethnic – reflects the diverse mechanisms by which Asian-American students negotiate their ethnic identity with their religious identity.

From this data, I conclude that religion is a dynamic means by which Asian-Americans become more American. As Wu (2002) argues, because Asian-Americans often are seen as foreign and un-American, they commonly use several mechanisms to demonstrate their assimilation into American culture. In my study, I find that Asian-Americans consistently professed similar values and beliefs as non-Asian-Americans on questions correlated with religiosity. Moreover, I find that Asian-Americans in multi-ethnic ministries prefer to minimize ethnic differences more than Asian-Americans in ethnic-specific ministries. Based on the data, Asian-Americans in multi-ethnic ministries are more likely to discount ethnic differences and profess homogenizing Christian beliefs. Thus, two processes exist within the Asian-American religious community:

those in multi-ethnic ministries downplay their ethnic identity in favor of Christian identity; and those in ethnic-specific ministries reconcile their ethnic and religious identities within the context of religion. Both processes create a unique identity for second-generation Asian-Americans who separate themselves from the stigma attached to the foreign aspects of their identity. Religious participation binds them to America. Essentially, this negotiation results in a unique identity that emphasizes the distinctive experiences of being a second-generation Asian-American.

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