

QUEERING THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST:
A CASE STUDY OF THE LEAVING SILENCE PROJECT

by

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ABSTRACT

Leaving Silence: Queer Asian and Pacific Islander Oral History Exhibit (October 1996) is both a community project and an educational campaign, that was conceived and executed in Seattle, Washington. The 12-panel exhibit is composed of 13 narratives and 34 black-and-white photographs, and its theme is "coming out." The narrators and those who appear in the photographs identify as queer and as Asian and Pacific Islander. The project involved the collaboration of four community-based organizations: the Asian Lesbian and Bisexual Alliance, the Asian Pacific AIDS Council, the Asian Pacific Islander Homosexuality/Homophobia Education Project, and Queer & Asian. In this thesis I analyze this exhibit and demonstrate its relevance to critical pedagogy and to all those movements interested in the establishment of social justice.

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CHAPTER 1: QUEERING THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

Time, now to desist from this arbitrary story. That's right, desist, as in to cease, to stop, to give myself pause.¹
 -- Ashok Mathur

The moment of coming out is like the moment of coming into consciousness: before it arises, there occurs the slow process of emergence. Like a story waiting to be told, like a person waiting to be found, I take a deep breath and hold it inside. I count the seconds and, eventually, let my breath out. Acknowledging my own identity, no longer bound by social mores and cultural comforts, I come out loudly, drowning your ears with shouts of "Asian lesbian!" I want time to stop, right at this moment, while the echoes still ring in your ears.
 -- Denise Tang

Leaving Silence: Queer Asian and Pacific Islander Oral History

*Exhibit*² is the culmination of a community effort in Seattle to document "snapshots" of what "coming out" means to individuals who identify as queer and as Asian and Pacific Islander (API).³ Our "snapshots" consist of thirteen short narratives enhanced by thirty-four black-and-white photo portraits. Placed on twelve panels, these thirteen narratives and thirty-four portraits represent various experiences in the lives of queer Asian and Pacific Islanders. The initial idea to conduct a queer Asian and Pacific Islander visibility campaign was supported by representatives from four local community organizations located in the Chinatown/International District of Seattle, Washington: the Asian

¹ Ashok Mathur, "The Desisting Reader," *West Coast Line* (Vancouver: Simon Fraser University Press, 1993), 67.

² The term "queer" was traditionally used as a derogatory term for lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and the transgendered. We, the organizers of the exhibit, reclaim the word "queer" and, in so doing, proudly use it to express our sexual identities. Within the politics of queer activism, "queer" is inclusive of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and the transgendered.

³ The project organizers never defined the term "Asian and Pacific Islander." We defined ethnic background according to the geographical region to which an interviewee traced his/her ancestral roots. Along with the text of the exhibit panels, we listed the interviewee's name, year of birth, place of birth, ethnic background, and profession (e.g., Ron Ho; b. 1936; Honolulu, Hawaii, United States; Chinese; Jewellery Artist). In a grant application to the funding body A Territory Resource, Anne Xuân Clark of the Asian Lesbian and Bisexual Alliance used 1990 US Census data pertaining to the number of Asian and Pacific Islander women in King County, Washington State, to describe the racial constituency that her organization serves and to justify its request for funds.

Lesbian and Bisexual Alliance (ALBA),⁴ the Asian Pacific AIDS Council (APAC), the Asian Pacific Islander Homosexuality/Homophobia Education Project (APIHHEP),⁵ and Queer & Asian (Q&A).⁶

The question I address here concerns how a community project such as the *Leaving Silence* exhibit can increase our knowledge of queer Asian American lives. In particular, I explore how the exhibit can further public awareness of the queer Asian American subject and thus be used as a tool to enhance pedagogy. This thesis takes a first step towards demonstrating the rationale for queer Asian American scholarship, its complexity as a subject, and its place within educational curricula. It also contributes to filling the gap in this area of research and to documenting how minority communities mobilize around social issues. As a self-identified Asian lesbian activist, I rely upon social justice movements to inform my research practice, to frame my inquiry, and to fuel my search for a more inclusive educational agenda.

The purpose of *Leaving Silence* is clearly presented in its mission statement: "To promote the visibility and understanding of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgendered in the Asian and Pacific Islander communities." Through the process of producing the exhibit, we created dialogues around the necessity of queer API visibility as well as around the need to develop a queer API identity. The term "visibility," contested and subjective as it is, was often used when we attempted to describe the nature of the exhibit. We believe that the coming out narratives and the photo portraits enhance the public recognition of queer APIs. For us, the exhibit was a tool for raising public awareness of the marginalized queer voices within API communities. It was also a visual display that featured proud people, described the obstacles they

⁴ ALBA is a social, political, cultural, educational, and advocacy group for Asian lesbians and bisexual women.

⁵ APIHHEP's mission is to eliminate homophobia, particularly within API communities.

⁶ Q&A is a collective made up of queer API men. In order to preserve and further queer API culture, this collective fosters leadership, fraternity, and mutual support.

faced due to their racial and sexual identities, and celebrated their accomplishments. As public audiences would vary according to location, we had no specific audience in mind when we assembled this exhibit. We imagined that *Leaving Silence* would have endless venues within which to illustrate the need for social justice.

This thesis is a critical investigation of the *Leaving Silence* exhibit. I was hired as a paid Project Coordinator for the exhibit. As an activist and researcher, I am concerned with clarifying its methodology, its role in questioning racialized and gendered identities, and its contribution to public pedagogy. With regard to public pedagogy, my research follows in the path of feminist pedagogue Carmen Luke's (1996) critical work in the area. Her theory regarding acknowledging education as a popular cultural form helped me to develop my analysis of *Leaving Silence* as a pedagogical tool. Luke argues that "the teaching and learning of feminine identities" begins in infancy. Mothers learn about pregnancy and childcare by speaking to other women or reading books and magazines. They also learn the meanings of gender through these popular cultural forms. In raising their children, mothers impart to them the socially constructed meanings of femininity and masculinity, as well as other sexualities. Children continue to discover and to absorb these definitions as they watch television programs and play with their peers. Luke's investigation of children's play as public pedagogies inspired me to locate pedagogies outside of traditional educational sites.

I see my work as contributing to those areas of scholarship (e.g., cultural criticism, feminist studies, critical pedagogy, etc.) concerned with, *inter alia*, unpacking conventional terms such as "Asian" (which tends to exclude lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgendered persons) and "education" (which tends to exclude the importance of public pedagogy). Such unpacking serves to show how, through excluding and/or rendering invisible, our terminology contributes to the

repression/oppression of the Other, the marginal.

In Chapter 1, "Queering the Pacific Northwest," I describe the early stages of the exhibit's development. I provide information on participants and discuss their relationship to the project. As well, I provide the reader with my reasons for pursuing this research, and I contextualize them within Asian American scholarship and queer Asian literature. Finally, by problematizing the category "Asian and Pacific Islander," I attempt to define the term "Asian American" and show how I use it in my research.

In Chapter 2, "Finding the Queer Subject," I provide a literature review, contextualizing my thesis within existing scholarship. I focus my area of research on Asian American movements, feminist writings and gay liberation works. I also bring up fictional texts in the form of novels and literary essays to further support the lack of queer Asian academic materials. I end the review chapter with a brief discussion on pedagogy.

In Chapter 3, "Methods and Procedures," I discuss interview procedures and review the methodology used in collecting data for the narratives. I outline the coordination processes of a community project. Furthermore, I explain my role as a paid organizer and project researcher.

In Chapter 4, "Differences with Queer Asian Identity: Narratives and Images of Identity-making," I offer a detailed analysis of the coming-out narratives. Common narrative themes include: generational difference and the use of the word "queer," the relationship between achievement and family acceptance, and being in-between. Besides discussing such themes in detail, I also address the (to me) surprising number of times religion cropped up in the interviews, even though it was never directly addressed in the interview questions. Since the photographs make up a major part of the exhibit, I discuss how these images were perceived in our image-filled society and how they increased

queer Asian visibility while, at the same time, limiting notions of who counts as queer and Asian.

In Chapter 5, "The Pedagogy of a Travelling Exhibit," I explore the possibilities of using *Leaving Silence* as a public pedagogical tool. I follow Carmen Luke's advice to seek educational moments in unexpected places (Luke 1996, 1). I also make use of Leslie Roman and Christian-Smith's (1988) notion of a feminist materialist politics of cultural studies to support the exhibit's role in destabilizing queer Asian identities.

The concluding chapter provides a summary of previous chapters. I point out the implications of my thesis and how it leads me to future research options.

Leaving Silence: Early Stages

In October 1995, Thomas Gamble, Anne Xuân Clark, and Bob Shimabukuro met to discuss submitting grant applications for a community project. As the chairperson of Queer & Asian and the gay male outreach worker at Asian Pacific AIDS Council, Thomas Gamble was responsible for submitting grant applications to Pride Foundation and the City of Seattle. Gamble was the primary contact for the host organization, Asian Pacific AIDS Council (APAC), and for myself as project coordinator. He helped me with administrative duties and gave me directions for coordinating the exhibit. Anne Xuân Clark was the campaign manager for the Seattle Chinatown/International District Preservation Development Association, and she submitted grant applications to Pride Foundation as well as to A Territory Resource. A Territory Resource (ATR) is a public foundation that supports activist, community-based organizations working for social, economic, and environmental justice across the Northwest in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming. As a board member of the Asian Lesbian and Bisexual Alliance, Clark worked closely with Gamble to bring Asian

lesbian and bisexual women and gay Asian and bisexual men together for community events; they both also worked to mobilize these communities to fight against various discriminatory measures targeted towards immigrants and refugees. Bob Shimabukuro was the executive director and founder of the Asian Pacific AIDS Council. His personal and professional commitment in the field of AIDS prevention and education established him as an outspoken activist in the Asian American community in Seattle, Washington.

Established in 1989, APAC served as an advisory council to the People of Color Against AIDS Network (POCAAN). APAC's mission statement concerns providing culturally relevant, language-accessible services and education for the purpose of preventing the spread of HIV and assisting those (primarily within API communities) who are HIV-positive or who developed AIDS. APAC has produced HIV/AIDS information brochures in seven API languages, and it has conducted safer sex workshops for students as well as for health care and social service professionals. Apart from its work in the field of HIV/AIDS, APAC was instrumental in bringing the issue of homophobia to the forefront of Seattle's Asian American community. As a result of its collaboration with APIHHEP, a poster entitled *Unite Against Homophobia* (which featured eighty people from Seattle's API communities) was produced and distributed throughout the United States. APAC, the host organization, provided the administrative support for *Leaving Silence*.

Initially, it was the grant writers who defined the project. In a funding proposal to the Pride Foundation, dated 1 November 1995, Gamble wrote:

The primary goal of this project proposal was to promote the visibility and understanding of gays/lesbians/bisexuals within Asian and Pacific Islander communities. We propose to do this through the construction of visual displays that include photographs of gay/lesbian/bisexual community members and their families. In addition to the photographs, we will present the coming out stories of those pictured (both

from the perspective of the individual who came out as gay/lesbian/bisexual, as well as the perspective of the family).

The exhibit was to appear in a variety of venues, including colleges and universities, community centres, art galleries, museums, health fairs, and conferences. In order to strengthen the grant application, we arranged a consultation between representatives of APAC and representatives of the Wing Luke Asian Museum.⁷ Before we received funding approval, the museum expressed interest in displaying the exhibit.

It was expected that the exhibit would lead to increased referrals to Asian and Pacific Islander lesbian/gay/bisexual support groups. It would also mean an increase in requests for facilitators capable of conducting anti-homophobia workshops through APIHHEP, and an increase in requests for assistance from "mainstream" health organizations interested in expanding their programs to include services for API lesbians/gays/bisexuals.⁸ By December 1995, the Pride Foundation agreed to provide funding for a part-time project coordinator and a photographer. Not until April 1996 was further funding secured from the City of Seattle's Department of Neighbourhoods, thus enabling us to have a full-time coordinator as well as a graphic designer. The time frame for gathering data and completing the exhibit was to be only four months.

⁷ The Wing Luke Asian Museum is centrally located in the Chinatown/International District. It hosts a permanent exhibit, entitled *One Song, Many Voices: The Asian Pacific American Experience*, that shows the 200-year history of Asian Pacific American communities in Washington State, focusing on ten major ethnic groups. The Wing Luke Asian Museum was also responsible for producing an archival document entitled *The International District: Portrait of a Community*, which contained over thirty interviews with long-time residents and businesspeople who provided their personal views of the International District and the Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Vietnamese, and African Americans who shaped its history. The museum is organized into five sections: immigration, employment, community life, discrimination, and cultural traditions. This institution was significant to the *Leaving Silence* project because of its critical presence and influence in the Seattle area.

⁸ Programs for transgender populations were not mentioned in pamphlets and literature from these health organizations, nor was I familiar with any transgender services when I was working within the Chinatown/International District community.

I was hired as the Project Coordinator in June 1996. My social location as an Asian Canadian posed a challenge to the work itself. How could I forge community relations without being a part of the Chinatown/International District community? How could I convince others about queer Asian visibility when I am perceived as an outsider? What were the terms of community ownership for the local queer community when an Asian lesbian from Vancouver, British Columbia, took on the role as a paid organizer? I pondered upon these questions prior to my acceptance of the position and during the first few months of my employment. I came to the conclusion that the geographic disposition was not a major factor. The fact that I am Canadian did not invite any remarks about my ability to bridge communities. More importantly, my professional and volunteer experience with the queer Asian Canadian community provided me with skills and insights that I could transfer to another queer locale. For me, being an outsider meant taking the time to decode community relations and to unravel collective memories. In reality, I was warmly welcomed by both the Chinatown/International District and the queer Asian communities. My worries as an outsider soon dissipated as I concentrated on the project itself. Community members shared openly their experiences with me. I was able to learn from their words and to honor their generosity through giving back to the community. I participated in community events such as an annual pig roast, a welfare reform demonstration, a street fair and two parades.

Participants

The recruitment of volunteers began early. Active members in queer API social support and advocacy groups spread the news that we were working on a visibility project. Gamble sent out notices of the first advisory committee meeting to immigrant agencies, health organizations, and local queer API groups. This meeting was presented as an information session that was open to any individual interested in

the project. Volunteer interviewers were mostly recruited from people who had previously been involved with APAC, ALBA, APIH/HEP, and Q&A. Promotional materials and, later, media coverage mentioned the need for volunteers. Active recruitment on the part of project staff and advisory committee members occurred at different outreach events.⁹ Positions that were filled by volunteers included: narrators, interviewers, transcribers, outreach workers, writers for community newspapers, and advisory committee members. The only paid positions for the project included its coordinator, the graphic designer, and the photographer.

Role of Advisory Committee Members

The advisory committee was divided into a Working Advisory Committee and an Honorary Advisory Committee. Working Advisory Committee members took a "hands-on" approach to the project in that they attended monthly meetings and attempted to provide overall direction. Most members of this committee also worked in different social service organizations within the Chinatown/International District. In other words, this was a closely knit group of community activists who had a considerable investment in the project. Honorary Advisory Committee members consisted of community leaders who lent their support to the exhibit by allowing their names to be publicly associated with it. In other words, their endorsement enhanced the exhibit's credibility. The Working Advisory Committee had ten members, while the Honorary Advisory Committee had eleven (see Appendix B, List of Advisory Committee Members).

As well as creating a tangible product, it was essential to publicize and promote it. Working Advisory Committee members were expected to act in the interests of the exhibit and to actively pursue opportunities to promote it. Some members raised funds from businesses

⁹ *Leaving Silence* shared information tables with APAC at the Chinatown/International District Summer Open Market and at the Seattle Pride Parade Fair in Volunteer Park.

located in the Chinatown/International District, while others utilized personal and professional connections to secure information tables at community events and/or to obtain various forms of media publicity. Strategically, it made sense to list certain advisory committee members, both working and honorary, for certain purposes. For example, Janet Lee SooHoo, being the deputy director of the Asian Counseling and Referral Service (ACRS), is well known throughout Washington for her work in the field of mental health and is also respected within the Chinatown/International District community. As a result of her direct involvement, the exhibit received support from ACRS as well as from International Community Health Services (ICHS). ICHS's support for a queer API visibility campaign demonstrated to other agencies the importance of supporting social causes that are not necessarily defined as part of their mandates. It also encouraged more community involvement, and it mobilized communities to address the issue of homophobia. Significantly, both ACRS and ICHS were key health service providers in the area.

For the purposes of publicity, it was crucial to recruit politicians who would support queer API visibility. The fact that Martha Choe (Seattle city councillor) and Velma Veloria (Washington State representative) were Honorary Advisory Committee members raised the exhibit's profile and increased its legitimacy. As project organizers, we were keenly aware of the political benefits that would accrue to these politicians as a result of their support of the exhibit. The politicians also had histories in community organizing within Asian American movements and had spoken out on social issues concerning Asian Americans. By putting the queer issue on their political agenda, the politicians recognized the growing strength of queer Asians and Pacific Islanders in the Chinatown/International District community. At the same time, these people might reap the political benefit of attracting queer Asian and Pacific Islander votes. However, the decision to

actively recruit politicians as Honorary Advisory Committee members was not embraced by every Working Advisory Committee member. At one meeting, for example, Committee Member Thomas Gamble expressed his frustration when a high-profile politician on the Honorary Advisory Committee did not fulfil her fund-raising commitment. We discussed this kind of problem, and we decided that future projects should have clearer guidelines pertaining to the duties of Honorary Advisory Committee members.

A Confession

I must point out that we, as a collective, failed to ensure that *Leaving Silence* included Pacific Islanders and, to a certain extent, transgendered people. Only two people of native Hawai'ian ancestry were interviewed, and one of them - Kamuela Ka'Ahanui - was not exhibited. In wondering why, I remembered that, at the time, I was focused on finding narratives that had sufficient content for verbatim adaptation onto exhibit panels with minimal editing. I found an excerpt in Ka'Ahanui's interview that was most intriguing: "To me, coming out is a white experience. You'll have to understand more about native Hawai'ian history. Hawai'ians and Polynesians have a structured society where gay people have always been a part of our history." But the conversation between the interviewer and Ka'Ahanui was scattered, and I was not able to contextualize adequately this excerpt. In hindsight, it is clear to me that I should have contacted Ka'Ahanui for a second interview.

As one of the people responsible for this exclusion, I very much regret our failure to address, or even see, this issue during the process of co-ordinating the project. Not only can I not recall how such an exclusion was allowed, but the minutes of the Working Advisory Committee meeting at which I presented my selection of narratives are missing from the archives. However, the interview tapes, transcript notes, and transcript index forms remained with the host agency -- Asian

Pacific AIDS Council. These documents gave me an idea as to why certain decisions were made, but they did not explain how they were made within the Working Advisory Committee meetings. Sadly, the lack of Pacific Islander representation in *Leaving Silence* points to our own prejudice and to our complicity in reinforcing oppressive practices. In an essay entitled "'Asian Pacific Islander': Issues of Representation and Responsibility," J. Kehaulani Kauanui and Ju Hui ("Judy") Han, as community activists in Asian American queer movements, question the politics of exclusion: "By stopping short of truly acknowledging the heterogeneity and diversity of the groups of people 'API' claims to represent and include, we replicate the relationship between the 'dominant' and the 'minority'" (Lim-Hing 1994, 377-79).

We neither created nor actively pursued alliances with Pacific Islander communities, and this was largely because, as happens with many such projects, most contacts were established through word of mouth and through the personal and/or professional relationships of project organizers. This is not to say that a project can only operate within the already-established networks of its organizers, but, as in the case of *Leaving Silence*, it often comes down to this. Thus it would be both more appropriate and more accurate to say that this is a queer Asian American community project, and, from this point on, this is how I shall refer to it. *Leaving Silence's* omission of Pacific Islanders will stand as a reminder of our insensitivity and irresponsibility as community activists.

With regard to our general omission of the transgendered, the one transgendered person we interviewed wanted her narrative to be accompanied by an illustration of the sun rather than by a photograph. At the time of the interview, she was very concerned about being known as a male-to-female transgendered person and feared for her safety. We of course complied with her wishes, but this drew criticism when the

exhibit was displayed in Portland, Oregon. One transgendered person wrote a letter to Asian and Pacific Islander Lesbians and Gays to argue that we lacked the commitment to find a transgendered person who was willing to be photographed.

That lack of commitment reinforces the shame and internalised transphobia so many transpeople suffer from, reinforces the message that transyouth looking for role models should look outside the queer community, and reinforces my suspicion that all too often much of what passes for "inclusion" is mere lip-service.

(Just Out, 6 June 1997)

This criticism is justified. However in fact because of our failure, I would like to reiterate the importance of including both male-to-female and female-to-male transgendered persons in future projects. This seeming lack of commitment to the transgendered community is partly due to an absence of coalition-building between lesbian and gay groups and transgendered organizations. Only recently has the subject of transgender been included in Asian lesbian and bisexual conferences (such as the Asian Pacific Lesbian Bisexual Network 1998 conference in Los Angeles).

The inclusion of transgendered individuals was also a contested issue in feminist organizing among women's communities. I believe that some of the difficulties women's communities have with regard to accepting the transgendered community comes from a biological deterministic point of view.¹⁰ Personally, I find it highly problematic when arguments for the exclusion of transgendered persons are focused on the biological aspects of transgenderism. Instead of looking at how oppression permeates the gender spectrum, these positions ignore the reality of violence against transgendered persons. Since most

¹⁰ Two prevalent issues in women's communities are male privilege and same-sex desire. The male privilege concern generally crops up with both female-to-male and male-to-female individuals. In the case of female-to-male transition, it is often thought that the individual can immediately assume a male identity and, therefore, be rid of oppression. In the case of male-to-female transition, it is often believed that the individual lived as a male person before and, therefore, lacks an understanding of what it is to be a woman.

transgendered individuals are in male-female relationships, the matter of same-sex desire becomes very complex. Sex assignment surgery alters the simple picture of a woman falling in love with another woman. We are faced with the challenge of facing new definitions of womanhood. In taking a progressive step towards including transgendered voices, the organizers of the Building Bridges: Spanning Our Past Toward Our Future conference recognized the need to view oppression across different constructions of gender identity. Laying the groundwork for this kind of coalition-building takes a significant period of time -- much more than was granted by the timeline of *Leaving Silence*. Transgendered persons are beginning to be recognized in the Asian lesbian movement, as is evidenced by their presence in the last Asian Pacific Islander Lesbian and Bisexual Network Conference held in June 1998 at the University of California, Los Angeles. Slowly, we are working towards including transgenderism as part of our analysis of race and sexuality.

If we recognise *Leaving Silence* as a queer Asian American project, then we need to address the essentialism that this involves. Commenting on the socially constructed category of "Asian American," and drawing upon postcolonial theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's concept of "strategic essentialism," cultural critic Lisa Lowe reminds us that "Asian American" can be used strategically "for the purpose of contesting and disrupting the discourses that exclude Asian Americans."¹¹ What Spivak is referring to with the phrase "strategic essentialism" is the way in which terms such as "Asian and Pacific Islander" can be inserted into public and political discourses when least expected in order to disrupt the dominant discourse. For example, according to the Census 2000 data the Asian and Pacific Islander population in the State of California was estimated at 13 percent of the nation's population. However, in the City of San Francisco, California,

¹¹ Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 82-83.

the Asian and Pacific Islander population was estimated at 30.7 percent of the city's population. Consequently, the category of "Asian and Pacific Islander" could be used strategically to demand that policy makers offer social services and programs targeted towards this particular population. Lowe goes on to explain that, by the same token, the term "Asian American" can challenge its own gaps and lacunae. For example, as *Leaving Silence* suggests, although it is not generally recognized, the term Asian American includes gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered people from a diverse number of geographical regions, nationalities, generations, and social classes. If we align our queer-selves with our identity as Asian Americans, then we are problematizing the term by insisting that it take into account queer sexuality. Through our consistent questioning of the term "Asian American" and our insistence that it incorporate queerness we are subverting it, forcing it to include previously displaced populations.

Interestingly, the exhibit organizers invited people not only from the "ordinary" Asian countries, but also from places like West Asia (commonly referred to as Iran). Bookda Gheisar voiced how she felt about identifying as West Asian:

My ethnicity is something that I've only had to face in this country. I've only ever heard the term Middle Eastern when I moved here. I was raised in Iran as a child learning that I was Asian, West Asian. We were in the Asian Olympic games, Asian soccer tournaments, Asian whatever ... we were Asian. So everything I related to was [concerned with] being an Asian person growing up in the continent of Asia ... By the time I was twenty I was very politically active, and by then I could understand how Europeans related to us. We're in the middle of the East in relation to Europe. So then I've been Middle Eastern, and I've never, ever liked that term. And I know right now on the East Coast in the United States, and in London, and in Paris, where there are more politically organized so-called Middle Eastern communities, we are really trying to get our own communities to stop using that term and to continue to refer to ourselves as West Asian.

By including Bookda's narrative in the exhibit the project

organizers manage to demonstrate the socially constructed nature of the term "Asian American," which is clearly capable of being adapted to accommodate politically appropriate definitions.

The Exhibit as a Political Entity

What does visibility mean? What does it mean to queer Asians and heterosexual Asians, to Asian immigrants and to Pacific Islanders, to non-Asians in queer communities, and to queers from marginalized racial backgrounds? Within these contexts, visibility is a cry for social justice and, as such, it is something that threatens the privileged and the powerful. Through the use of oral narratives transcribed from the members of queer Asian communities, along with black-and-white photo portraits and artistic images, *Leaving Silence* constitutes a clear political statement -- one that insists upon inserting queer Asian-ness into public discourse.

For lesbians, gays, and the transgendered, of course, coming out means becoming visible. It means steeling ourselves to being challenged again and again, both by those who care about us and by those who do not. Not surprisingly, in much of the literature on gay and lesbian rights, coming out is the first issue to be discussed (e.g., Oikawa, Falconer, Elwin, and Decter 1993; Oikawa, Falconer, and Decter 1994; Trujillo 1991). The act of coming out, involving, as it does, a definitive move away from normative heterosexuality, is a political statement par excellence.

The common assumption of hetero-normativity within Asian American communities stems from racial discrimination and racist practices within North America in general. Historical exclusion acts and American imperialism in Asia set the stage for the long process of racialization within immigrant and refugee communities living in North America. The Congress passed Chinese exclusion acts every two years during the period between 1882 and 1888. These acts prohibited Chinese labourers, should

they go back to China to visit friends and family, from returning to the United States. The Immigration Act, 1917, prohibited people from Southeast Asia and the islands of the Indian and Pacific Oceans from entering the United States. The Immigration Act, 1924, prohibited Japanese people from entering the United States. Immigration from Korea was not a concern for the US government during this time because Korea was occupied by Japan, which was effectively controlling the movements of Korean people. Prior to 1934 Filipinos and Filipinas were categorized as "wards" as the Philippines was an American colony. After the passing of the Tydings-McDuffie Act, 1934, Filipinos and Filipinas were recategorized as "aliens."

Some of these acts were a response to the economic need for cheap labour. Lowe identifies two periods during which cheap labour was urgently needed by the capitalist economy: the period from 1850 to the Second World War, and the period from the Second World War to the present. In the earlier period, Chinese, Filipino, and Japanese labourers played a major role in laying down rail tracks, working on sugarcane plantations, and working in garment factories. The exclusion acts then served as a way of controlling immigration numbers, monitoring the accumulation of capital, and preventing the labourers from building families. Anti-miscegenation laws were enacted for the same reasons. This early practice of exploitation continues into the present, as demonstrated in the presence of US-supported Asian and Latin American export processing zones. And, as American imperialism continues on a global scale, Asian and Latino immigrant women continue to work in low-wage industries in the United States. The ongoing exploitation of people of colour, which fuels the American capitalist economy and its multinational global corporations, further accentuates the need for communities made up of people of colour to unite and to fight for justice (Lowe 1996, 8-17). In order to protect themselves from oppressive practices, ethnic communities carefully passed on cultural

and social traditions. If these traditions were translated into the context of familial networks, then it must be recognized that heterosexuality was set up as a standard -- as a measure of loyalty to culture. And so, within the larger ethnocultural communities, the insistence upon visibility by queer Asian Americans is perceived as a threat, a betrayal. Queer Asian Americans are seen to be selfishly putting their individual agendas before those of their collective (read heterosexual) communities, and drawing more negative assessments of themselves. Within these larger communities, their visibility is an embarrassment, an irritant, an affront.

Homophobia and racism are pervasive throughout North American society, and queer Asian American visibility challenges it, disrupts it, questions it. The knowledge produced through assembling and exhibiting *Leaving Silence* speaks to the experiences of discrimination. Indeed, it was through "leaving silence" that the organizers were able to denounce the silence that has for so long been imposed upon queer Asian Americans. According to Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "the struggle over representation is always a struggle over knowledge" (Roman and Eyre 1997, xvi). In arguing for the existence of a queer Asian American exhibit, the organizers helped to legitimize queer Asian American scholarship. By justifying the need for a public exhibit, the organizers challenged the hetero-normativity in public spaces. Finally, the narratives on the exhibit panels represent queer Asian American experiences and place them squarely within the realm of public knowledge.

Political Activism: Past and Present

Sometimes I catch myself taking the availability of Asian lesbian resources for granted. Unlike the earlier days of the North American gay movements, now there is a stronger presence of queer Asian groups -- at least in urban centres. Asian Americans have learned to expect more from

the Pride parades and gay and lesbian film festivals. Through advances in communication technologies, it has become easier to locate our queer Asian sisters and brothers. Yet there are times when there is no acknowledgement for those who made all this possible, and there is no account of how much history has already been forgotten. Various anthologies have helped me to learn more about the history of the North American Asian lesbian movements. Essays in anthologies such as *Piece of My Heart: A Lesbian of Colour Anthology*; *The Very Inside: An Anthology of Writing by Asian and Pacific Islander Lesbian and Bisexual Women*; and *Asian American Sexualities: Dimensions of the Gay and Lesbian Experience* have contributed to the history and knowledge of community organizing in North American Asian lesbian communities. In her essay "Safer Sex in Santa Cruz," Mona Oikawa, a Sansei (third-generation Japanese Canadian) who founded Asian Lesbians of Toronto, discussed the difficulties of raising safer sex issues at the First National Asian/Pacifica Lesbian Network retreat in Santa Cruz, California, in 1989 (Silvera 1991, 155-9). Oikawa brought up a common myth -- that lesbians are not infected with HIV/AIDS -- and said that it was her reason for attending a safer sex workshop at the retreat. In the current field of HIV/AIDS, the discussion of safer lesbian sex still does not take place as often as it should. One of the major reasons for this is the lack of research on lesbian health issues.

Similarly, the search for family acceptance among queers has been an ongoing struggle through generations of gay activism. In a 1991 essay, Susan Chen, a public health worker and an Asian lesbian activist, described the painful process of coming out to her Taiwanese Chinese parents (Lim-Hing 1994, 79-84). Her parents expected Chen to get a good job and not become involved with political activities. She felt the painful conflict of wanting both to please her parents and to be an activist. In verbalizing her coming-out process, Chen allowed the

reader to feel that she or he was not alone in the struggle to come out as queer and Asian American. Her agonizing experience is shared by many queer Asian Americans through letters and essays published in newsletters and anthologies. The persistence of these issues illustrates a demand for public awareness of queer sexuality and for an increased understanding of homophobia as manifested in real lives.

To me, activism is like a slow rush: it forms unconsciously, remaining steadfastly in the background, until suddenly it gushes right through me, pushing me towards the act of speaking up. It is with this kind of emotion that I wrote these pages. Yet this emotion has been tempered with careful calculations and much research, as will become evident in Chapter 2, where I present a literature review of existing scholarship.

CHAPTER 2: FINDING THE QUEER SUBJECT

My mother tells me that, long into the night, I used to tell stories using the fingers on both of my hands, naming each finger and making them all talk to each other. And this, I suppose, was my first attempt at coalition building.

-- Denise Tang

In attempting to review the literature on queer Asian Americans, I soon found that I was going to have to take an interdisciplinary approach to my work. The reason for this is simply that there is so little scholarship directly related to this group of people. I begin with an overview of Asian American social movements and how they contribute to the formation of Asian American identities. Then I proceed with a survey of fictional works written by activists and cultural workers, followed by a discussion on feminist literature. Towards the end of the chapter, I turn briefly to the subject of cultural studies and media representation. I return to the documents collected during my position as the Project Coordinator as a closing round for this literature review.

As noted in the introduction to *Queer in Asian America*, David L. Eng and Alice Y. Hom (1998) suggest that Asian American studies, as an academic discipline, built upon the social activism and political movements of the late 1960s and 1970s. The Asian American movements, feminism, and gay liberation established the need for further discussion of the intersections of racialized, gendered, and economic categories within an American context. For example, in the early 1970s Gil Mangaoan, a writer and long-time organizer for gay, Filipino, minority non-profit organizations, formed a study group consisting of students from various educational institutions. The purpose of this group was to learn the histories of Filipinos in the United States (Leong 1996, 101-11). Gary Y. Okihiro, a scholar in international and public affairs, explained that the early vision of ethnic studies was to develop a more inclusive history -- one that took into account the histories of Native

Americans, Africans, Latinos, and Asians (Okihiro 1994, 150-1).

Inspired by the civil rights movement, the anti-Vietnam War movement, the removal of American military bases in Asia, and national liberation movements in Third World countries, the Asian American movement began in inner-city ethnic enclaves, college campuses, and rural farmlands. In 1979, six Chinese and Chinese Korean women writers (Nancy Hom, Genny Lim, Canyon Sam, Kitty Tsui, Nellie Wong, and Merle Woo) formed Unbound Feet (Ho, Antonio, Fujino, and Yip 2000, 235-42). This feminist collective wrote poetry and prose and performed in various venues (primarily in cities along the West Coast). Their works addressed the issues of racism, sexism, homophobia, and other forms of discrimination. Also significant around this time period was the way in which the women's movement organized around violence against women. Asian American feminists were working hand-in-hand with white feminists to locate shelters and staff rape crisis telephone lines (Shah 1997, 63-6). On the gay front, the 1969 Stonewall riots sparked interest in exploring the interconnectedness of race and sexuality.¹² Although it was not often mentioned in mainstream accounts of the riots, a number of Latino and African American drag queens were active in community organizing during this period. In assessing these different areas of social activism Asian American studies scholars were able to make the connection among racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia and to see how these forms of oppression affected (and, sadly, continue to affect) the lives of Asian Americans.

Works of theory devoted to Asian American identities emerged in the 1990s and, among other things, began asking questions relating to gender studies. Published in the 1994 issue of *Amerasia Journal*, sociologist Dana Y. Takagi's essay -- "Maiden Voyage: Excursion into

¹² During the summer months of 1969, the New York Police Department conducted multiple raids on gay bars, African American nightclubs and Latino bars. It was the raid on Stonewall Inn that mobilized young gay men, butch lesbians and drag queens to speak up against police brutality.

Sexuality and Identity Politics in Asian America" -- encouraged Asian American studies scholars to include queer sexuality in their discipline's rhetoric. At the same time, Takagi warns us against the simple practice of too simply defining a lesbian and including this category in our discussions of Asian American studies; instead, she urges us to begin our gender analysis from a plurality of sexual identities and to avoid the never-ending exercise of attempting to precisely define one's sexual practice. In using a pluralistic term such as "sexualities," we are attempting to be inclusive in our approach to sexual practice.

Lisa Lowe's pioneering book, *Immigrant Acts*, sheds light on how masculinity played a part in determining one's citizenship in the United States. The attainment of citizenship is a crucial process because a nation-state is defined by its citizens. Therefore, in determining citizenship, the principles of heterosexuality and of desire for a nuclear family had to be upheld by applicants. Hence, prior to the Second World War, the deliberate exclusion of Asians from multiple legal discourses resulted in their assignment to a less-than-masculine identity. The term "less-than-masculine identity," not surprisingly, frequently translates into a deviant sexual identity commonly understood as homosexuality. An appreciation of this assertion of gender into Asian American studies constitutes the first step towards understanding queer Asian American sexualities.

Lesbian and gay studies have not always taken into account queer Asian Americans and other lesbians and gays of colour. As a result, queer Asian Americans have turned to literature -- to poetry, prose, and literary anthologies -- in an attempt to make themselves visible. This is not only true of queer Asian Americans, but also of queer Asian Canadians. In particular, Asian lesbian and bisexual women writers such as Larissa Lai, C. Allyson Lee, Shani Mootoo, Sky Lee, and, more recently, Rita Wong are avid contributors to poetry anthologies and are

authors of well received novels. In the poem "for annie," Rita Wong takes the story of a Chinese woman named Annie (who ran away from her owner in Idaho in order to marry her lover) and uses it to examine herself as an Asian woman living in North America.

i am not annie, i am of annie & i want it back. my eyes, my
lips, my fingers,
my breasts, my rumbling stomach. all mine. my blood
thundering to deafen an army. jab of my insistent elbow. my
pulse
beats defiance: i am i am. (Wong 1998, 23)

As her defiant self moves through the poem's verses, she unites
with a symbolic annie,

the one that got away. she was almond grace, salty treasure,
we talked
rivers, waves & oceans into the night, her strong black hair &
mine
tangling into nets to catch stories. my mouth waters when i
allow
myself to remember her cassia lilted laugh. in another
lifetime we
could have built villages of women. today she lives mountains,
rivers,
taboos away. clench & shiver, clench & shiver into silence.
the taste of
her salt on my tongue. (Wong 1998, 25)

The intertwining contexts of Asian women's history and woman-to-woman desire in Wong's poetry inspired me to find other writers who wrote openly about same-sex desire. Asian lesbian, visual artist and writer, Shani Mootoo's (1996) novel, *Cereus Blooms at Night*, blends lesbian and gay characters into a story of passion and betrayal complete with overtures of colonial histories and generational woes. Tyler, a male caretaker at the Paradise Alms House, became intrigued with Mala Ramchandin, a patient whose father sexually abused her and whose mother eloped with a woman. The wailings and mutterings of Mala captured Tyler's attention as he slowly discovered the life story of Mala through town rumours and conversations. Mootoo uses fiction in order to comment on gay and lesbian sexuality, gender roles, colonialism, and incest.

Similarly, Asian lesbian, activist and writer, Larissa Lai's (1995) *When Fox Is a Thousand* uses Chinese mythology to explore women's lives.

Spanning time, Lai deploys three narrative voices: the Fox, Yu Hsuan-Chi (the ninth-century poetess) and an unnamed narrator living a contemporary twentieth-century life. As the Fox moves through a thousand years and the final transformation into a woman's body, we are faced with tales of seduction, murder, and immortality. Whereas Wong's poetry presents a strong sense of social realism, Mootoo's and Lai's works touch on queer Asian sensitivity through mythic landscapes and vivid characters. These works helped me set the framework for the imaginative space occupied by the exhibit. The overall lack of queer Asian scholarship prompted me to survey both fiction and non-fiction works for a more thorough understanding of the topic itself. Therefore, I believe that it is crucial for me to survey a selection of literary writings in addition to Eng and Hom's (1998) edited volume of essays on queer Asian American identities. This group of literary writings was selected for their contents in expressing same-sex desires and for their authors in identifying with queer Asian women's communities.

In the past two decades, Asian lesbians have focused on feminism in their attempt to develop critical analyses of social and cultural differences. Feminists of colour have contributed a large amount of scholarship to dismantling the class and European assumptions inherent within "feminisms." For example, Audre Lorde, Gloria Anzaldua, Cherrie Moraga, bell hooks, Rey Chow, and Gayatri Spivak have helped to put the writings of feminists of colour on the women's studies map. bell hooks has written extensively on the tensions between feminists of colour and white feminists. In her 1984 collection of essays, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, hooks was critical of how feminism was seen as "white women's rights efforts" (hooks 1984, 23). She questions whether activists in the feminist movement reflect on the broad social and political reality of women's lives in order to include race and class in

their analyses. More interestingly, she brings up the issue of ownership and representation with regard to defining the term "feminism." She points to the lack of participation by women of colour and the reluctance of white feminists to address the race issue. In *Thinking Through*, Himani Bannerji (1995, 55-95) criticizes feminists for focusing too strongly on one's personal experience as a strategy of inclusion. She urges us to look beyond personal experiences and to integrate social relations into our analysis of who we are and where we come from. She warns us of how difficult it is to mobilize communities if our analyses are based only on our own experiences. Her analysis helped me to examine how differences are being framed and treated within the women's movement.

With regard to building bridges between feminists of various backgrounds, I was inspired by the work of Gloria Anzaldúa. In her essay "Bridge, Drawbridge, Sandbar or Island: Lesbians of Color Hacienda Alianzas," Anzaldúa says that a bridge is "a mediator between yourself and your community and white people -- lesbians, feminists, white men" (Albrecht and Brewer 1990, 223); a drawbridge, which has the ability to withdraw from or to extend towards others, signifies the element of choice; an island, which exists as an entity separated from other land masses, signifies a state of solitary being; and a sandbar, which is a partially exposed strip of sand formed by the natural momentum of tide and waves, signifies the state of movement. Anzaldúa's analogies offer positive strategies for building coalitions, and they also indicate that there will be times when we need to retreat. I imagine myself as either a bridge or a sandbar, depending upon the stage of community organizing with which I'm involved.

I view myself as an Asian lesbian, a feminist, and an AIDS activist. This being the case, I recognise that feminist writings provide a point of departure for my own work. It is my intention to merge feminist activism with research; thus, it is logical for me to

turn to feminist research methodology. During my undergraduate work in Women's Studies, I came across feminist methodologists Liz Stanley and Sue Wise's essay, "Feminist Research, Feminist Consciousness, and Experiences of Sexism." Stanley and Wise suggest that, in conducting their research, feminist researchers often address "the personal" (Fonow and Cook 1991, 266). "The personal" is defined as that which constitutes a feminist researcher's personal experiences and academic background. Stanley and Wise's research on obscene phone callers began when their home phone number was publicly advertised as a contact number for local gay groups in England. Not only was their research tied in with their activist involvement with gay and lesbian communities, but Stanley and Wise also discussed the short-, medium-, and long-term effects of these calls. I was drawn to their methodology because it was committed to integrating activism with research practices. By exposing their personal and academic involvement in their research, Stanley and Wise demonstrate how they were personally transformed by their own research, thus developing a different consciousness of the world around them (Fonow and Cook, 1991, 265-83). As a community activist and researcher, the notion of transformation speaks to me. Community activism transformed my inner self and research sustained my passion in the activism itself. My ongoing commitment in social justice issues is informed by theories on gender identity and racial dynamics. As I immerse myself in the writing of this paper, I can feel a shifting of consciousness. A consciousness that reinstates activist work in academia. A consciousness that shows the potential of grounding theories in social actions.

In my search for a researcher who embodies as many selves as do I, I found Francisco Ibanez. A community researcher, a health educator, and a survivor of HIV/AIDS, Ibanez is interested in the relevance of the HIV/AIDS prevention educational curriculum to the daily lives of Latino gay males. His research primarily involves participatory ethnographic

interviews, and I was immensely moved by his approach towards interviewing: "I consciously attempted to make the interview a moment of reflection, negotiation, and meaning making for all of us" (Castell and Bryson 1997, 122). Furthermore, Ibanez's research involves political advocacy. By analyzing interviews as educational moments pertaining to the multiple subjects of sexual identity, cultural belonging, and HIV/AIDS, he hopes to educate people regarding the attitudes towards the relationship among race, culture, sexuality, and living with HIV/AIDS. Similarly, in writing this thesis on the *Leaving Silence* exhibit, I hope to educate readers regarding queer Asian American representations. I also hope to shed light on the need for more queer visibility amongst Asians and Pacific Islanders.

I am particularly interested in feminist theories that critique First World/Third World tensions and that attempt to provide anti-oppression frameworks within which to analyze existing conditions. Examples of this may be found in the works of Chandra Talpade Mohanty, M. Jacque Alexander, Himani Bannerji and Roxana Ng. A grassroots community activist and feminist scholar, Chandra Talpade Mohanty has written extensively on the effects of global capitalism on Third-World women in low-wage industries. Her essay "Women Workers and Capitalist Scripts: Ideologies of Domination, Common Interests, and the Politics of Solidarity," addresses how First World corporations and free trade treaties create economies within which Third World countries are sites for factory assembly lines (Alexander and Mohanty 1997, 3-29). She argues that Third World women become agents of production in the "global exploitation of labour" (8). At the same time, these Third World sites also become a common ground where women can attempt to build solidarity and to fight against the oppressive employment practices of multinational corporations.

With regard to global economies, lesbian and postcolonial theorist M. Jacqui Alexander explores how the influx of multinational capital is

dependent upon a heterosexual state. She points out how the tourism industry in the Bahamas benefits "the imperial tourist" and, as a result, thrusts a nation into a condition of servility (Alexander and Mohanty 1997, 67). "The imperial tourist," who comes from a wealthy North American background, lands upon the shores of the Bahamas expecting a blend of exotic cuisine and local hospitality. Translating hospitality into terms of sex tourism, Alexander focuses on how women in the Bahamas are sexually commodified. Meanwhile, as tourism brings economic viability, state structures are geared to enforcing patriarchy and compulsory heterosexuality (63-100).

Roxanna Ng, in her essay "Sexism, Racism, Canadian Nationalism," demonstrates how various factors of gender, race/ethnicity, and class relations contribute to the social formation of the Canadian state and its capitalist agenda (Bannerji 1993, 182-96). Ng traces the history of immigrant labour and its role in building the Canadian nation. During the period between 1880 and 1920 Canada imported male labourers from Ireland, Ukraine, and Scandinavia to work on farms, and male labourers from China to work on railways. In addition, Pacific Islanders, also referred to as the Kanakas, were brought in to work at timber mills. During the same time period, working-class women from Britain were recruited by upper-class British women to serve as domestic helpers. Ng urges us to link the history of oppression to our current understanding of how different forms of oppression interact within Canada.

Although the aforementioned feminist literature was essential to my understanding of feminism, I also turned to writings -- both fiction and non-fiction -- by lesbians of colour. These writings helped me to analyze recurring themes in the *Leaving Silence* narratives. General queer studies anthologies do not address the issue of race in as specific or detailed a manner as do the writings of lesbians of colour. As for gay Asian men's writings, the only ones I have found that deal with social activism are the essays in Eng and Hom (1998) and

publications by local gay Asian organizations. In my personal experience in community organizing in Vancouver, British Columbia, I found it difficult to engage the gay and bisexual Asian male community on issues of political advocacy. Whereas Asian lesbians and bisexual women were always visible at political rallies and demonstrations against social injustice, one would rarely see the same level of enthusiasm on the part of the queer Asian men's community. One reason for this might be the queer Asian women's community's close association with women's movements and feminist beliefs. Another might be the privileged cultural position of males.

Shifting my gaze towards cultural studies, media representation, and film studies, I was inspired by the writings of Richard Fung (1991). As a filmmaker and queer Asian activist, Fung wrote an influential essay that investigates the perception of gay Asian sexuality within gay pornography. This essay, aptly entitled "Looking for My Penis: The Eroticized Asian in Gay Video Porn," examines the racialized representation of gay Asian males within gay pornography. A gay Asian male is often seen on screen as an exotic subject of desire. By problematizing the racial dynamics in gay pornography, Fung points out the role of pornography in perpetuating racial stereotypes among gay communities. Fung examines porn videos which show gay Asian men in a state of servitude to white men. He argues that gay pornography is "an active agent in representing and reproducing a sex-race status quo." (1991) Similarly, South Asian lesbian film director Pratibha Parmar uses her films *Flesh and Paper* and *Khush*, to demonstrate the diasporic histories of lesbians and gays of colour. Parmar challenges the notion of a homogenous gay community by depicting people of colour characters on screen, weaving the fictional accounts and documentary life stories into her films' storylines.

I also turned to Leslie Roman and Linda Eyre's (1997) definition of a "feminist materialist politics of cultural studies" in order to

delve deeper into the intersection of feminism and cultural studies. Roman and Eyre acknowledge the significance of cultural commodities with regard to how we understand gender relations and with regard to our daily practices. They view cultural commodities "as the products of a capitalist mode of production" and question the gender division of labour involved in their production. For example, when we watch a popular drama on the television, we are absorbing, negotiating, rejecting, and accepting certain coded meanings regarding gender identities. A cultural commodity, as such, is often produced by a media corporation and intended for particular audiences. The effective marketing of cultural commodities shows how media corporations can use their capital and resources to instill in us certain definitions of the world. Roman and Eyre's analysis explained for me why there is a lack of queer Asian American representation in the general media. The media have an unlimited role in disseminating information, yet they also control the kind of information available. Given that the media corporations are motivated almost solely by profit, it is no surprise to find that mainstream North American media cater to heterosexual, middle-class populations. Although the *Leaving Silence* exhibit is not in any way a commercial product, it is an alternative form of cultural commodity -- one in which queer Asian American identities and experiences are asserted and placed before the public eye.

There is no doubt that Stuart Hall is the leading authority in the area of cultural studies; however I found that Luke (1996) and Roman and Christian-Smith (1988) took Hall's insights and provided them with a much needed gender lens. Cultural and literary critics in the discipline of Asian American studies were also useful in that that inserted gender identity into the cultural studies discussion (Lowe 1996; Kumar 2000; Miki 1998).

Apart from the reflections of theorists and activists, I also opened my filing cabinet and reviewed past advisory committee members'

notes, meeting minutes, and materials from the volunteer package. Materials in the volunteer package included two copies of consent forms, an agreement form to be signed by the volunteer interviewer, interviewing and transcribing tips, procedures for conducting oral history interviews, a transcript index form, interview questions, and a brochure describing the project. Needless to say, the interview transcripts and the audiotapes provided the basic working material for my research. Further to this, newspaper clippings, press releases, and administrative paperwork filled in some of the gaps in my memory bank. In Chapter 3, "Methods and Procedures," I shall outline the methodology in data collection and the processes of coordinating the exhibit.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS AND PROCEDURES

In March 1996 I was recruited by members of the Seattle group Asian Lesbian and Bisexual Alliance (ALBA) to apply for the position of project coordinator for *Leaving Silence*. They had attended the conference "Lotus Roots: A Gathering of East and Southeast Asian Lesbians, Gays and Bisexuals," which I had coordinated in Vancouver, British Columbia. "Lotus Roots" was a two-day event held at Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House under the sponsorship of the Asian Society for the Intervention of AIDS.¹³ The purpose of the conference was to bring together East and Southeast Asians who identified as lesbian, gay, and bisexual in order to discuss issues that were common to our racial and sexual identities.¹⁴ On both days there were various workshops, literary readings, video screenings, and social events. I was pleased to be approached by the Seattle group because I was very much interested in taking the skills that I had acquired through coordinating "Lotus Roots" and applying them to a different context and for a different queer Asian community. I felt that it would be good for me to work with other community activists within a cultural and social context that would enable me to challenge mainstream notions of history and politics.

In June 1996, I was officially hired as the project coordinator for *Leaving Silence*. I was given a four-month time frame and put in charge of the overall production and coordination of the project. I was responsible for coordinating the Advisory Committee meetings, providing support to the volunteers, ensuring the interviews were taped and recorded, and publicizing the exhibit and arranging for its display locations. I worked very closely with the Working Advisory Committee

¹³ The Asian Society for the Intervention of AIDS (ASIA) is a community organization based in Vancouver, British Columbia. Its mandate is to provide language-appropriate and culturally sensitive HIV/AIDS prevention and education to East and Southeast Asian communities. Over the last four years, ASIA staff have coordinated two queer Asian conferences and one anti-homophobia poster campaign, and they have produced a multi-lingual support pamphlet for parents and friends of queer Asians. As one of ASIA's employees, I learned to coordinate projects on a grassroots level and to advocate for lesbian and gay rights.

members and obtained valuable feedback from them on matters ranging from community contacts to logistical details relating to the construction of the panels. My meetings with them involved open discussions within which everyone's voice was heard and valued. The paid staff consisted of a photographer, a graphic designer, and myself. Zone Montoya was the photographer; she was hired on a contract basis and was responsible for all photo sessions as well as for the development and reproduction of photo portraits. In 1989, Zone had been involved in the Asian lesbian and bisexual group in Seattle that had pre-dated ALBA. Tracy Tsutsumoto was the designer, and she was responsible for the complete layout of the exhibit panels. She also designed the souvenir booklet, the promotional postcard, and the invitation card for the opening reception. Before joining us, Tracy had produced layout and design for the *International Examiner*, Seattle's Chinatown/International District community newspaper. The three of us collaborated on the artistic direction of the exhibit.

One of my major responsibilities was to select the narrators who were to appear in the exhibit and to edit their narratives. I based my decisions on the information contained in the transcript index forms, upon which interviewers wrote their summaries of the interviews (see Appendix D). Using the information provided in the forms, in selecting narrators I took into account the following criteria: (1) balance of positive and negative experiences, (2) age differences, (3) ethnic diversity, (4) sexual identity, (5) political beliefs, (6) generation (i.e., length of time in the United States), and (7) social background.

Criterion 1, the balance of positive and negative experiences, was important to me because, as much as we are proud of our identities, we are also, through encountering discriminating practices, constantly reminded of our place in society. By portraying positive experiences

¹⁴ The transgender population was not included in this conference.

that validate our being queer and Asian American as well as negative experiences that clearly indicate the social injustice endemic to our society, the narratives provide a holistic picture of queer Asian American lives. With regard to the Criterion 2, age differences, it is obvious that, in general, coming out in the 1960s was much more difficult than was coming out in the 1990s. Depicting narrators from different generations enables the exhibit to contribute to an inter-generational dialogue that is educational to organizers and viewers alike. The youngest narrator, Tino Umali, was seventeen, and the oldest, Ron Ho, was sixty when the interviews were conducted.

Personally, I believed that Criteria 3 and 4, ethnic diversity and sexual identity, respectively, were the most important and obvious for determining which narratives would be accepted. As soon as I began coordinating *Leaving Silence* I knew that, when it came to choosing narrators, we would be restricted to a relatively small pool of people (i.e., whoever happened to be available within the community at hand). We also relied upon the connections of the Working Advisory Committee when it came to selecting narrators, being content to go with whomever they felt comfortable approaching. As I have mentioned, in hindsight, this was a failure on my part: I should have ensured that there was adequate Pacific Islander participation.

With regard to Criterion 5, political beliefs, I felt that it was important to incorporate anti-oppression frameworks into the narratives. If the narrators talked about anti-oppression, then I would try to include this in their excerpts. As for Criterion 6, generation, in selecting narrators with an eye to representing diverse generational backgrounds I hoped to demonstrate what coming out means for a recent immigrant as opposed to what it means for, say, a third-generation Asian American. Similarly, with regard to Criterion 7, social background, socio-economic status and employment situation affect coming out process.

With regard to media relations, I was the primary person to respond to any queries concerning the rationale of the exhibit and/or its ongoing development. I advertised the exhibit in such promotional materials as brochures, newspaper articles, and the souvenir booklet we put together for the opening reception. Since I worked mainly with volunteers, I compiled information for a volunteer package; I also drew up a final evaluation form for my role as project coordinator. As a wrap-up exercise, I wanted to find out what the volunteers thought about the coordination process. In addition, the evaluation form could serve as a supporting document for the grant applications for future visibility campaigns.

I supervised all volunteers (who checked in with me when they needed to report on their progress or lack thereof) except those on the Honorary and Working Advisory Committees. Throughout this brief, four-month period, I contacted, negotiated, and arranged for three display locations: the Seattle Public Library, the University of Washington, and the Heart-to-Art Gallery. In order to arrange having *Leaving Silence* displayed at these locations, I had to make appointments with site managers and convince them of the exhibit's importance. Fortunately, through the Working Advisory Committee, we had contact persons at the Seattle Public Library and the University of Washington. This made introducing the exhibit much easier, and it kept the negotiating process to a minimum. In order to arrange for a display site, one normally needs to explain to the site administrators why the exhibit is appropriate for them. After the site administrators approve the nature of the exhibit, then the next step is to arrange the requisite dates and space. The queer nature of *Leaving Silence* could have made it very difficult to contact site administrators as there is always a fear of homophobia. Fortunately, because the Working Advisory Committee had the names of queer or queer-friendly staff members at the display venues, we could, for the most part, avoid these difficulties.

Aside from recruiting individuals to participate on the advisory committees, I was actively seeking project endorsements from agencies in the area and "mainstream" gay and lesbian organizations (See Appendix C, List of Community Endorsements). Through these endorsements I hoped to gain access to the facilities of the agencies in question as well as to secure public support for the exhibit. By allowing themselves to be associated with the exhibit, these agencies were, in effect, declaring public support for it. Some of them also donated funds to help defray the exhibit's expenses.

The early commitment of volunteer organizers to widely publicizing the exhibit and to facilitating community interest in queer Asian visibility contributed immeasurably to its successful coordination. I was fortunate indeed to step into a network made up of individuals who had extensive activist backgrounds in advocating for the rights of racial minorities.

Michelle Fine's (1994) essay, "Dis-stance and Other Stances: Negotiations of Power Inside Feminist Research," points to the importance of recognizing one's location within the web of research relations. First, she calls for the researcher to expose her political and theoretical standpoint within the research project, taking into account the possibilities of moving between locations during the research process. Second, she asks for critical analyses of research material and open discussions on "contradictions and conflicts within collaborative practices" (23). I was politically drawn to the *Leaving Silence* project because of my prior experience in organizing within queer East and Southeast Asian communities in Vancouver. I felt that the *Leaving Silence* project would enrich my understanding of queer Asian identities across national borders. In writing this thesis, I am both scholarly researcher and paid project coordinator. As a scholarly researcher, I am supposed to expose the strengths and weaknesses of the project; as the project coordinator, I was supposed to advocate for and

defend the project. Through crossing role boundaries I have learned to critically analyze my insider's knowledge of the subject matter and to question my own thinking. In essence, the writing of this thesis has become a "collaborative practice," involving my multiple identities (i.e., as researcher, community activist, project organizer, and Asian lesbian).

When attempting to decide whether or not to accept the position of project coordinator, I had some difficulty gauging my own abilities in the regard. I spent a great deal of time contemplating my Asian lesbian identity in diaspora, and this soon developed into concerns over my ability to mobilize the communities in Seattle's International District. Not only was I an outsider to these communities, I was also not familiar with their past history and the dynamics between their various agencies. The differences in the cultural, social, and political aspects of the Seattle API population and the Vancouver API population also contributed to my growing list of worries. Finally, I was unclear about the past interactions between queer API and non-queer API communities, and between queer API communities and mainstream queer communities. Still, I believed that this complex layering of relations would provide me with an exciting challenge. After all, I was fully aware of the fact that, if worst came to worst, I could always "escape" back to Vancouver.

As with every research project, methodology is a contested ethical site. The narrative theme of coming out as queer APIs posed many difficulties around the issue of confidentiality. Not only did the narrators disclose varieties of queer sexuality, but the black-and-white photo portraits on the exhibit panels catapulted them into a public and dangerous space. Since the purpose of *Leaving Silence* was to ensure the visibility of queer APIs, the members of both advisory committees as well as the staff worked to locate accessible public spaces for its display. However, we were well aware that this meant that the narrators could easily be put in the position of being the targets of homophobic

acts, ranging from job loss to gay bashing. (I have not heard, either from the Working Advisory Committee members or the narrators, about any such incidents.) It was difficult to ensure the safety of the narrators even though we were aware of the potential dangers involved in this project. Clearly, the careful handling of both transcripts and photographs was top priority: each participant was consulted, and each granted her/his consent to the final form of her/his part of the exhibit.

The researcher is often positioned as an expert who is embarking upon a journey to discover the "truth" about something. Feminists have pointed to the exploratory nature of research and to the way in which the knowledge of marginalized populations has been colonized. Feminist pedagogue and anti-racist theorist Leslie G. Roman's ethnographic research on middle- and working-class punk women directly challenges the subject/object dualism in positivistic research. Roman (1993, 281) proposes the concept of "double exposure" to illustrate how a feminist materialist ethnographer can use self-reflexivity to reveal her "prior beliefs and structural (class, gender, and racial) interests" for or against her subjects of study. The researcher problematizes the act of discovery as she shapes the analysis of what constitutes the "truth." The "truth," as such, is no longer a purely objective claim.

Similarly, Linda Alcoff raises the issue of what occurs when a socially privileged person speaks about marginalized populations as if she/he is familiar with their conditions. Alcoff calls for a close examination of the social, political, and cultural locations of the speaker, the contents of her/his speech, and its intended audiences. In being accountable for their research findings and the effects they have on their subjects, Alcoff (1991, 26) warns researchers to be aware of the possibility that they will simply by "further silenc[ing] the lesser-privileged group's own ability to speak and be heard."

In my work with *Leaving Silence*, I kept these issues firmly in

mind, constantly attempting to ensure that I remained sensitive to the constructed nature of "truth" and to how easy it is to appropriate the voices of others. I believe that, in the end, my role as researcher enabled me to "give back to the community" by documenting an important community project, investigating its coordination process, and analyzing its place within public pedagogy. My research findings should benefit other community activists who are interested in developing similar projects within other socio-cultural contexts. Each queer API community in each city could potentially use the findings as a template to coordinate their visibility campaigns. More interestingly, community-based organizations could use the exhibit as an example of how to locate funding for their own projects. And educators and students could use my research to open up conversations dealing with the intersection of activism and academia as well as to expand opportunities for conducting activist research in the area of education.

Interview Procedures

We began recruiting interview subjects immediately after a brainstorming session during which we discussed a number of possible interview candidates. Working Advisory Committee members called out the names of people they personally or professionally knew and I wrote these down on sheets of flip-chart paper. The discussion centred around who the committee members could approach and ask to participate in a project of this nature. Based on the resources of the Working Advisory Committee members, a total of thirty-eight interview subjects were suggested at the 19 June 1996 meeting. Then, depending on who had access to the interview candidates, the Working Advisory Committee members and I contacted potential interviewers and solicited their participation. Among the thirty-eight possible interview candidates, twenty-one agreed to participate in the exhibit. At this point, we were trying to recruit as many participants as we could in order to have a

larger pool from which to choose when it came to the final selection process. As we did not know the people the committee suggested, there was no significant discussion of their appropriateness or inappropriateness for the project.

As a closely knit group of community leaders and activists, the members of the Working Advisory Committee were respectful of each other's opinions. We recruited volunteer interviewers from the Working Advisory Committee and from ALBA's and Q&A's membership bases. Since most of the Working Advisory Committee members signed up to be volunteer interviewers themselves, there were only limited positions available for other volunteers. One of the reasons that the members of the committee were interviewers was that, when approached to participate in the project, many of the narrators asked for them. As a result, we only needed to recruit a handful of volunteer interviewers.

When word of *Leaving Silence* spread within our relatively small queer API community, I was immediately approached by five people who were interested in learning to be interviewers. I knew one of these people personally, and the others were referred by Working Advisory Committee members: these people filled the remaining positions. Most of these volunteers have some experience of interviewing for research topics used in college term papers. All interviewers were either still attending college or graduated from university with an undergraduate, and in one case, with a graduate degree. These volunteer interviewers underwent no formal selection process. The Working Advisory Committee and myself were more concerned with asking queer Asian community members to conduct the interviews. I was also hoping that an interviewer from the community would ensure a certain degree of cultural competency and queer sensitivity in the interviewing process. Each interviewer was given a volunteer package that contained the following materials: two copies of consent forms, an agreement form to be signed by the volunteer interviewer, interviewing and transcribing tips, procedures for

conducting oral history interviews, a transcript index form, interview questions, and a brochure describing the project. I spoke directly with each interviewer about her/his role and responsibilities and explained the type of administrative or emotional support that she/he could expect from me. Other than written materials, the interviewer had access to tape recorders and transcribers provided by the Asian Counseling and Referral Service and by the Wing Luke Asian Museum. Audiotapes were used to record all interviews. The opening letter to the interviewers clearly stated our deadlines as the interviews had to be conducted and transcribed within four weeks. I encouraged the interviewers to take notes during their interviews and to try to transcribe them themselves. Although this process would, of course, be time-consuming, the interviewer would be in a better position than anyone else to remember the tone, atmosphere, and dynamic of the interview and so could be expected to provide a more sensitive accounting of it.

In the guidelines provided to the interviewers I offered suggestions concerning listening skills, how to transcribe interviews, and what procedures to use when conducting them. I compiled the volunteer package in consultation with the Working Advisory Committee members and with Ron Chew, the director of the Wing Luke Asian Museum. Based on the assumption that the act of interviewing has different meanings for different people, I was careful to present this process within a feminist framework. For example, the interviewer was to be aware of her/his values and attitudes pertaining to "class, sexual identity politics, racial politics, age, health issues, language and cultural traditions."¹⁵ Our values always inform our actions and words, and these can easily become assumptions that determine the nature of our questions. It was my hope that the guidelines would be used to raise the interviewer's awareness of her/his own subjectivity and of how that subjectivity affects her/his role as an interviewer.

During the process of compiling information for volunteer interviewers, I relied on feminist approaches to interviewing. I took a participatory approach to the interviewer-narrator relationship and to the possibility of conscious or unconscious exploitative behaviour on the part of the interviewer. For example, I was aware of the fact that an interviewer might have known the narrator within a certain context prior to the interview. These two people could, for example, have known each other within a romantic context or within a community organizing context, thus having certain tensions or conflicts. I urged the volunteers to be honest and open about discussing these possible scenarios. Furthermore, as I have said, in our homophobic society the theme of coming out is an extremely sensitive one. The words of the narrator could easily be held against her/him and could result in verbal harassment and physical violence. Therefore, the interviewers needed to make it clear to the narrators that the contents of the interviews would be accessible to the public. The interview questions that I devised covered a variety of topics, from personal information to specific issues (see Appendix E, Interview Questions). The list of questions was intended to help the interviewer prepare for the interview as well as to define areas of particular importance. In the guidelines I pointed out the importance of open-ended questions and cautioned against unwittingly asking leading questions (see Appendix E, Interview Questions).

All volunteer interviewers reported having conducted one- to two-hour interviews with each interview subject as well as having spent a remarkable number of hours transcribing the tapes. I can still recall the frustrated remarks made by volunteers when they realized they had to record every "eh" or "ah" and every moment of silence that occurred during their interview sessions. However, some volunteers also felt that the exercise of transcribing the tapes made them conscious of their interviewing techniques as well as of the subtleties contained within

¹⁵ Quote taken from "Guidelines for Interviewer & Transcribing Tips."

the narratives. I insisted that the narrators' words be taken down verbatim, with no grammatical corrections or changes to style of speech. Once again, my reasoning was based on feminist research into the interviewing and recording of interview data. As part of the process in finalizing the narratives, I gave each narrator the draft version of the text and asked for her/his feedback.

I was responsible for selecting the transcripts that would be used in the exhibit, and I did so based on the selection criteria mentioned earlier in this chapter. I did not face as many questions regarding the selection process as I thought I would. In fact, upon giving the Working Advisory Committee my reasons for selecting certain people and not others, I was not asked to defend my choices at all. To this day, I do not know why I was not challenged on my decisions. Even though it is flattering that the committee members trusted my ability to "do the job right," I wish there had been more discussion around my choices. I recall being nervous at the meeting and waiting to be grilled. However, this simply did not happen.

The next step for me was to edit the interviews and send them back to the narrators for their comments. I did not have the interviewers help with editing the transcripts because I felt that, given it took them at least ten hours to transcribe the interviews, it would be too much to ask. This was especially true for those interviewers who were also part of the Working Advisory Committee. In hindsight, I see that it would have been valuable to solicit their help and feedback when editing the narratives. With the exception of one person (who rewrote the entire interview and resubmitted it), the narrators restricted their comments to grammatical corrections and minor changes. Most of the interviews were revised twice before being accepted by both the narrator and myself, at which point they were submitted to the Working Advisory Committee for feedback.

At the same time, we conducted photo-shoots with each narrator and

the family members of their choice. It is common for a gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgendered person to remain in the closet because s/he is afraid of losing family ties. In particular, if s/he is dependent upon the family for immigration or finances, the act of coming out means jeopardizing her/his livelihood. It is not uncommon for a gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgendered person to be forced to sever biological family ties and to seek emotional support from friends. The traditional nuclear family is not always conducive to the well-being of queer persons. Therefore, in recognition of these obstacles, the project organizers made it clear that both biological and non-biological family members were most welcome to take part in the photo shoot. Where the portraits were to be shot, and how the subjects were to be portrayed, was negotiated between our photographer and the narrators. The number and size of the photos to be included in the exhibit was left entirely to our graphic designer. I navigated my multiple selves between the photographer and the designer, participating in nine photo sessions and two late-night design sessions. My purpose in appearing at the photo sessions was to further introduce myself to the narrators, for I had met none of them prior to this project. I was conscious that my presence may have been somewhat disruptive and was careful to stay out of any conversations concerned with photo compositions. The late-night design sessions were mostly concerned with providing written text to the graphic designer, in particular regarding the production of the souvenir booklet that was to be ready for the exhibit's opening reception.

After a narrator confirmed her/his willingness to participate in the exhibit, I would locate a volunteer interviewer and obtain an agreement from both parties. The volunteer interviewer would agree to interview the narrator, and the latter would agree to be interviewed by the former. Most of the people were interviewed by whomever had made initial contact with them. The interviewer would fill out the Transcript Index Form and write an abstract of the interview (see Appendix D,

Transcript Index Form). Each interviewer explained to me in detail how the interview went and how she/he felt about it. Twelve interviewers conducted twenty-one interviews.

Prior to the interview, the narrator signed the Consent Form for Interview Subject/Narrator (See Appendix F, Consent Form for Interview Subject/Narrator). In signing this form, she/he gave the project organizers "permission to use the contents of [the] interviews, whether tape-recorded or otherwise, for such scholarly and educational purposes as the Advisory Committee of the Exhibition shall determine, including literary publication."¹⁶ We also requested permission to use the photographs (whether taken by the photographer or given to us by the narrator) in the exhibit. I included in the consent form a paragraph on the possibility of excluding interviews in the final stage of the project. Basically, I wanted to explain clearly that not all interviews would be included. Due to budgetary constraints, the exhibit was limited to twelve panels.¹⁷ This being the case, diversity became the main criterion upon which I based my decisions regarding what to include in the exhibit. The choice of photographs remained with Zone Montoya, the photographer.

Project Development: The Later Stage

In September the staff finalized the selection of interviews, the editing of narratives, and the printing of photo portraits. As the date for the exhibit's opening got closer, Tracy worked fifteen-hour days to finish the layout design for the panels and the souvenir booklet, which was to be offered at the opening reception at the Wing Luke Asian Museum. The fourteen-page booklet included information on how the exhibit came about, featured selected photographs of the narrators, and

¹⁶ Quote taken from the Consent Form for Interview Subject/Narrator.

gave profiles of participants and organizers. It also provided a comprehensive list of API and API-supportive lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered organizations. Following the last Working Advisory Committee meeting, committee members were asked to fill out an evaluation form for the project (See Appendix G, Evaluation Form). A table of expenses and a brief memo were later mailed to them to denote my departure as project coordinator (See Appendix H, Final Memo).

The first public showing of *Leaving Silence: Queer Asian and Pacific Islander Oral History Exhibit* took place on 7 October 1996 (appropriately enough, in the United States, October is National Coming Out Month) on the main floor of the downtown Seattle Public Library. The opening reception was scheduled thirteen days later and was held at the Wing Luke Asian Museum. Speakers at the reception included: Thomas Gamble (chair of the *Leaving Silence* Working Advisory Committee), Ted Lord (executive director of Pride Foundation), the Honourable Velum Velour (Washington State representative, 11th District), and Cassie Chinn (exhibit coordinator of the Wing Luke Asian Museum). The opening became a community event that brought together participants, organizers, and audiences in a celebration of the exhibit. One hundred and seventy-six people signed in at the opening reception, some coming from as far away as Anchorage, Los Angeles, and New York.

The exhibit was moved to Cunningham Hall at the University of Washington Women's Center on 30 October, where it remained on display until 13 November. For the month of December it was shown at the Heart-To-Art Gallery in Broadway Market, a trendy and queer-positive area in Seattle. By January 1997, *Leaving Silence* was turned over to the Exhibit Touring Services at Eastern Washington University and became a

¹⁷ The Pride Foundation funding proposal only listed four panels for the display. Further fund-raising efforts by advisory committee members and the staff team made it possible for us to mount a twelve-panel display.

national travelling exhibit.¹⁸

In Chapter 4, "Differences with Queer Asian Identity: Narratives and Images of Identity-Making," I provide an analysis of certain recurrent themes in the narratives. I then go on to examine the photographs and to determine their place in our image-filled society.

¹⁸ *Leaving Silence* has since been on display at the University of Ohio and various locations in Portland, Oregon. Touring reports have been hard to trace since the person responsible for our exhibit, Jim Rosengrun, left the Exhibit Touring Services. I had a conversation with him prior to his departure, and he mentioned that touring reports were sent to the Asian Pacific AIDS Council (APAC). However, when I talked with employees of APAC, they did not know of the existence of such reports. APAC eventually became a program within the International District Health Services and relocated its office. Following the closing date of the contract, *Leaving Silence* was returned to APAC. Currently, the exhibit remains in storage in Seattle, Washington. Its next engagement was Lotus Roots 3: A Queer Pan-Asian Conference, which was held in May 2000 in Seattle, Washington.

CHAPTER 4: DIFFERENCES WITH QUEER ASIAN IDENTITY: NARRATIVES AND IMAGES OF IDENTITY-MAKING

Identities are to be demonstrated. Chinese has been demonstrated to her. She may demonstrate Chineseness if she wants to, in melancholic authentication.¹⁹
 -- Karlyn Koh

The specificities in identities are essential to the exercise of identity-formation through public pedagogies. In examining the narratives and photographs displayed in *Leaving Silence*, this chapter critically examines the racialized, gendered, social, cultural, and political aspects of being queer and Asian. The *Leaving Silence* narratives serve to demonstrate the complexities of a wide array of issues. They include the lack of a language to address queer sexuality, cultural barriers to coming out, the experiences of being multiracial and queer, and the relationship between self-esteem and coming out. Four particular issues recur most often throughout the interviews (1) generational differences with regard to the use of the word "queer," (2) the relationship between achievement and family acceptance, (3) being in-between, and (4) religion. They provide the basis of discussion for this chapter.

Generational Differences with Regard to the Use of the Word "Queer"

Traditionally, the word "queer" suggests eccentricity and strangeness. It is only within the last decade that this word has become a term inclusive of lesbians, gay men, transgender individuals, and bisexuals. Embraced by youth activists, the term signifies "a strategy, an attitude, a reference to other identities and a new self-understanding" (Smyth 1992, 20). The term "queer" also signifies a distrust of governments and state institutions. Most queer activists believe in direct-action strategies to convey their social and political

¹⁹ Karlyn Koh, "Yours Truly," *West Coast Line* (Burnaby: Simon Fraser University, 1998), 23-27.

message. Queer Nation, a group formed in April 1990 in response to gay and lesbian bashings in East Village, New York, developed these strategies. Members of the group used stencils and wrote on pavements "Queers Bash Back" and "My beloved was queerbashed here. Queers fight back" (Smyth 1992, 17). In other words, adopting queerness as an identity means being upfront about sexual identity.

Two narrators, Eric Ishino (a forty-six-year-old gay Japanese administrative services manager) and Karen Maeda Allman (a forty-two-year-old Asian lesbian doctoral candidate in nursing), commented on how their membership in an earlier generation affected how they viewed the word "queer."

Interviewer: What does the term or terms "queer" and "Asian" mean to you?

Eric Ishino: Well I guess I've never been comfortable with the word "queer."

Eric went on to link his feelings of discomfort to his identity as an older gay man.

I guess it's like being older than a lot of the Asians who identify themselves as gay. It's very typical [that, as] older gays and lesbians ... [we] always heard that ... term used [in a derogatory way when we were] growing up. So that it's kind of difficult to call myself a queer Asian ... I don't have a very strong identification as a queer Asian. I guess [I identify] more just as a gay man.

Karen felt similarly to Eric with regard to generational difference and the attitude towards the word "queer." However, she did discuss the benefits of using it as an umbrella term.

I know some folks of my generation, even now, don't identify as queer. But I like the inclusiveness of [the term]. [I like it that it includes] transgendered people and bisexual people. Oh, [I know that] it's an epithet [that's used] against people. You know, like "you queer," or "you dyke," or "you fag," you know. And some people feel like you can reclaim that word and other people don't think you can reclaim [it because] it's been used against you in a hateful way. But I kind of like it 'cause, to me, it speaks to greater visibility in the eighties and nineties ... I [think] that [the] queer generation's cool, [even though], you know, it wasn't my

generation.

Although Eric and Karen were close in age, their different professions and life experiences help to explain why Karen was more accepting of the term "queer" than was Eric. Identifying as a hapa woman (Japanese and European American ancestry), Karen always felt marginal in Tucson, Arizona, where inter-racial marriages were acceptable neither to Japanese American communities nor to the larger European American communities. In contrast, Eric went to elementary and high schools that had high percentages of Asian American and African American students. Although visibility as a gay man was certainly important to him, it may not have had the same degree of urgency as it did for Karen. In addition, Eric and Karen were involved in very different political arenas. Karen worked as a bookseller for a worker-owned cooperative bookstore, and she set up displays at various domestic violence conferences, literacy events, and/or cultural festivals. This meant that Karen, unlike Eric, was exposed to people (and literature) who used the term "queer" in a non-derogatory manner. Eric, on the other hand, was involved in electoral politics (he supported Cal Anderson, his life partner, who is the Democratic representative for Washington State), participated in Democratic party organizations and fund-raising activities. This is not a venue within which one would encounter the easy and positive use of the term "queer." And, of course, Eric mentioned growing up hearing the term used in a derogatory manner. In Karen and Eric we see how various factors can affect individual feelings about the appropriateness of the term "queer" as an umbrella term for Asian lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgender persons.

In describing *Leaving Silence* as a queer Asian exhibit, the organizers assumed a common understanding of the word "queer," and we used it as a referent for and an identifier of our sexual identity. We chose it because of its inclusiveness, but the comments of people like

Eric and Karen forced us to ask whether we were being sensitive to the word's derogatory connotations, its history, and the pain associated with it. Our assumption that "queer" was an appropriate descriptor for the exhibit was indicative of the fact that we were in our mid-twenties and early thirties (I was twenty-four); that we were "out and proud" within a North American context; and that we were well educated, middle-class, paid community workers. Our desire to reclaim the word "queer" and to defy those who would use it in a derogatory fashion was strong amongst us. We felt that we were ready, as an organizing committee, to challenge API communities and the wider gay populations. We also had the passion and the commitment to carry out a visibility campaign such as *Leaving Silence*. We were definitely embracing rebellion when we openly proclaimed that we were queer and Asian.

Perveen Ali, a twenty-seven-year-old bisexual Bangladeshi-American activist, felt that identifying as queer enabled her to locate her bisexuality within broader lesbian and gay communities. For her, using the word "queer" was a political statement.

Yeah. I call myself queer, and I do that for very political reasons because I think there's so much "bi"-phobia within the lesbian and gay community. It's a way of forcing visibility of bisexuality into queer agendas and forcing people to recognize that it's another sexual identity.

Karen Maeda Allman went one step further and problematized queerness as a primary sexual identity.

Um, to me, being queer and Asian, um, I don't think there's any such thing as being plain queer. You know, there's always some sort of gender piece to it, and there's always some sort of racial/ethnic piece that's happening along with it and that really kind of flavours one's queer experience.

Yet how does claiming a "queer" identity measure up to other anti-oppression work? Although accepting the political radicalism associated with the term "queer," some activists questioned its claim to be an "all-embracing term." It is true that the idea of being queer brought a

sense of freshness and excitement to anti-homophobia and AIDS-phobia work. While government structures and media institutions were not accessible to everyone, queer activists brought these social messages to public attention through "in-your-face" interventions. No longer were gay activists and AIDS activists waiting for government and medical systems to change; they were turning to queer activists for solutions. But activists of colour problematized the similarities between queer identity and gay identity. They asked the crucial question of whether queer politics addresses the complex issues of race and class. Lesbian activists wanted to know whether fighting sexism was on the queer agenda. In a booklet entitled *Lesbians Talk Queer Notions*, Cheryl Smyth (1992) brought together activists from all walks of life to discuss the term "queer" and its implications for anti-oppression movements. One of these activists was Suzanne Moore, a journalist and writer, who was concerned about queer politics being presented as "on the edge" (Smyth 1992, 34). Being a mother, she wondered whether the issue of childcare would be seen as exciting enough to be considered a queer issue. Filmmaker and lesbian of colour activist Pratibha Parmar cautioned against accepting an "all-embracing term" when most of the coalition work amongst and between communities of colour and "white" organizations has not yet been completed (31). This work still needs to be done, and trust needs to be built before the diverse lesbian and gay communities can come together and work under an umbrella term such as "queer."

The practice of reclaiming words is common among gay and lesbian communities in the United States and other parts of the world. For example, South Asian gays and lesbians in the United States use the Hindi and Urdu word "khush" to refer to their sexual identities. The word itself means happiness, but it has been recreated to stand for being gay and for being in a state of ecstasy. Likewise, a 1985 South Asian lesbian collective formed in the United States uses the Sanskrit word "anamika," which means "nameless," to refer to the relationship

between two women (Eng and Hom 1998, 141-42). Hong Kong gay activists have adopted the term "comrade" to address each other. During the Cultural Revolution, referring to another person as "comrade" was a way of demonstrating friendship, loyalty, and a commitment to the Chinese Communist Party. In appropriating this word, Hong Kong queers are making a serious attempt to establish the legitimacy of their sexuality.

When there is no appropriate language, the call to create one becomes urgent. Perveen clearly expressed this urgency:

And I think creating language is very important. It's the first form of resistance. It's speaking out. It's giving voice to these things [and] making them visible. From there you can use that language to work for institutional change and personal change as well.

A support pamphlet for East and Southeast Asian lesbians, gays, and bisexuals (as well as their families and friends) is entitled *Facing Out Together*. The pamphlet was part of a series of anti-homophobia community projects organized by the Asian Society for the Intervention of AIDS. The pamphlet's planning committee talked about "facing out" rather than "coming out." The term "coming out" is based on a mainstream North American/English understanding of coming to terms with one's sexuality, and it does not address the issue of "face," which is crucial to the coming out process experienced by East and Southeast Asians. Man Chui Leung, the project coordinator of *Facing Out Together*, introduces the "concepts of facing out and facing out together":

Two terms were used because many participants in the project described a process that consisted of two main parts: coming to terms with one's own sexual orientation, and telling others about our sexual orientation. Unlike the term "coming out," "facing out" encompasses the experience of coming to terms with one's own sexual orientation, and "facing out together" encompasses our support networks and people around us like our families and friends. "Facing out together" implies "facing out" *with* others, not just "facing out" *to* others. It also implies a necessary dialogue because we are all responsible [for] providing a supportive environment by working towards

eliminating all forms of oppression (Leung 1996).²⁰

The use of the term "facing out" helps to redefine what coming out means to Asian lesbians, gays, bisexuals and the transgendered. At the same time, it enables us to critically examine our everyday language and to challenge the assumptions behind it: who do they include and, more important, who do they exclude?

The Relationship between Achievement and Family Acceptance

For those interviewed for *Leaving Silence*, family acceptance was an essential part of negotiating their sexual and racialized identity. Indeed, seeking ways to gain family acceptance often became a lifelong quest. In all societies, achievement, however it happens to be defined, is perceived as a means of gaining acceptance. Asian Americans have long been "encouraged" to take on the role of presenting themselves as a "model minority." This particularly invidious stereotype first appeared in a *New York Times Magazine* article entitled "Success Story: Japanese American Style" on 6 January 1960. Comparing African Americans to Japanese Americans, sociologist William Petersen emphasized how Japanese cultural values and ethics helped to prevent them from being seen as a "problem minority." As a result, the "model minority" theory was used to minimize the importance of civil rights movements and to pit communities of colour against one another. During the 1970s and 1980s, the term took on a different meaning as magazine articles and newspaper columns depict Asian Americans as a homogenous group of over-achievers. In the 1980s, US president Ronald Reagan used this argument as the primary rationale for cutting funding for minority government programs. Nowadays, the "model minority" myth is still being contested within the media, while Asian American communities struggle to create a stronger

²⁰ Education pamphlet published by Asian Society for the Intervention of AIDS in 1996. Man Chui Leung was the Project Coordinator and editor of the pamphlet titled *Facing Out*.

community identity.

Lisa Lowe (1996, 6), a cultural studies theorist who writes extensively about how Asian immigration to the United States formed that nation's economic and political foundations, criticizes "the absorption of cultural difference" involved in labelling Asian Americans as the "model minority." In the language of the state, Asian Americans constitute a cultural group that has successfully integrated into the "American way of life." As a result, the mainstream views Asian American populations as one homogenous racial group, lacking any ethnic, linguistic, historical, and/or social differences. The label "model minority" is more than simply a useful tool for the state: it affects how Asian American communities view themselves and how they "monitor" their own behaviour. Similarly, David Palumbo-Liu, a scholar on comparative literature, comments on the separation of Asians as model minorities is in effect "a specific mode of containment" (1999, 4). He further explains the American expectation on Asian immigrants to apply their "Confucian values" to living and working in America (1999, 21).

In the introduction to *CelebrAsian: Shared Lives, an Oral History of Gay Asians*, the Gay Asians Toronto Book Project Committee (Gay Asians Toronto 1996, vii) shared its insights into the conservatism of overseas Asian communities: "In the face of various barriers to equality, Asian immigrants have reacted to discrimination by quiet avoidance or by becoming a well-behaved, conforming 'model minority.'"

In his interview, Eric Ishino told of joining a college fraternity and, in his role as rush chairman, receiving an award for recruiting new members. Interestingly enough, Eric chose to have his photo portrait taken at his place of work -- the Seattle City Council Administrative Office. One of the photos depicts him sitting under the City of Seattle emblem in the meeting room of the administrative office. This photo has an "official" air to it, and it suggests that Eric's job, which involved being responsible for budgets and financial matters within the

jurisdiction of the Seattle City Council, means a lot to him.

Norma Timbang, a forty-four-year-old Filipina bisexual mother of two, mentioned career achievement when she described how the situation of gay Filipinos has changed over the years.

There have been so many immigrants from the Philippines and so many immigrants from other Asian countries who are now so out that ... many of them are visible and own[] businesses even. [They own] businesses and [are] working in communities on issues, specific issues. And many of them have gotten [to] a space where they've been accepted.

In other words, acceptance comes with achievement -- in this case, being a successful entrepreneur within American capitalist society. So having one's gay lifestyle approved is associated with being a successful businessperson. Needless to say, managing to be a member of an upwardly mobile social class helps to prove that gayness does not necessarily prevent success. But this analysis tends to suggest that a gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender individual's worthiness comes from financial stability.

In answering a question regarding the future of queer Asians, Norma replied:

What kind of future would I imagine? I would have to say that we should own our own businesses or our own non-profit agencies, have our children, have our own homes and not be afraid to walk down the streets.

Norma's response establishes a clear relationship between ownership and queer Asian visibility. The much-repeated word "own" signifies her sense that queer Asians must be in possession of their own lives. This need to possess applies to both private (family and home) and public (social services, businesses, etc.) spheres. This private/public split relates to the liberal feminist critique that points out how women are systematically excluded from the public sphere (Jagger 1983, 198). Indeed, Norma's demand for access to public arenas points directly to a core concern of liberal feminism: "women's lack of

equality in public life" (178).

Ron Ho, a sixty-four-year old gay Chinese jeweller and teacher, felt very proud of his career accomplishments. He said that being a bachelor had allowed him to have the kind of "successful career" that being married would have prohibited. In his view, being an accomplished artist and teacher is not compatible with being a "family" man.

Interviewer: Your parents didn't want you to marry a Chinese girl?

Ron: I said to my mother when she asked me, "What, you're not going to get married? [You're going to] be like your uncle, old bachelor Uncle Joe?" I said, "Don't compare me to Uncle Joe because I've lived." I've travelled all over the world, you know, I've had a successful career as a teacher and also a second career as an artist, and I've done well in [both].

Shirley Yee, a forty-year-old Chinese lesbian, chose an academic career. This met with her mother's approval and, consequently, her lesbian sexuality did not jeopardize their relationship.

Interviewer: Do you feel like your mom put a lot of her hopes on you, in terms of what you were doing and forging?

Shirley: Yeah, I think maybe indirectly she was always very supportive about whatever career I chose, but it was also fortunate that I chose a career she approved of -- an academic career -- because I think she had always dreamed of being in the academy.

When Shirley came out as a lesbian, her mother was very worried that her daughter would lose her job as a professor of US women's history. The implication here is that it was all right for Shirley to be out as long as this didn't cost her her job. Amongst Asian peoples, family ties are extremely strong. The older generation often justifies its expectations of the younger generation by pointing out that it has provided the latter with a better and easier life. A good daughter or son should, in return, choose the right career, bring up the right family, and take care of her/his elderly parents and relatives.

Two narrators brought up the significance of being a good daughter or son. Val Kanuha, a forty-nine-year-old Hawaiian-Chinese

activist/social worker, mentioned how her being a "good kid" steered people away from asking her whether she had a boyfriend.

I never got into trouble, I didn't drink, I didn't smoke. All my friends went through [experimenting with liquor and cigarettes]. What we should have been doing at that age ... I didn't [do]. All my siblings went through driving too fast, getting speeding tickets, all those things -- drinking -- but I didn't. So I was always this good kid.

Prior to comparing herself with other siblings, Val talked about how she excelled in multiple areas of her life -- academic achievements, sports, and student political organizations. She pointed out that, because of her many accomplishments, she was never asked about whether she had a boyfriend. Rather than revolving around early marriage and motherhood, discussions tended to revolve around her being a good daughter and a stellar student. It was almost as though she were compensating for being a lesbian. In other words, in order to gain future acceptance as a lesbian, Val felt that she had to prove herself to be exceptional.

Even though Val always had very intense friendships with other girls, her achievements enabled her to avoid questioning of her lesbian identity. She mentioned that sexual relationships, whether with women or men, were not a priority for her. Her attraction towards women was not as important to her as was her involvement in sports, academic institutions, and student activism. She did not confront her family members about dating and sexuality issues. Val minimized the potential difficulties of coming out as a young person by asserting her independence in other areas of her life.

Tino Umali, a seventeen-year-old Thai-Chinese-East Indian-Filipino-Spanish queer youth activist, expressed his opinion as to why he turned out to be "a good son."

She has given me ultimate freedom and, like, since nothing is, like, hidden from me, there is no curiosity and there is no, like, rebellion against my mom or anything. So I have turned

out like, people like [say] why are you such a good son, and it's really weird because, like, I've never smoked anything -- no cigarettes, no drugs -- and, like, I don't go out [and] do drugs or do weed or whatever ... Like I don't know -- I know I like to cook food. Like I stay home and it's really weird how everything turns out.

In defining his relationship with his mother, Tino mentioned numerous times how close they were as a son and a single mother. Tino would be present when her mother's gay friends came to their house and engaged in conversations about gay relationships. His mother, Cholada Mizer, also had open discussions on sex and substance use with Tino. Tino felt that the trust between them was the reason why he was given "ultimate freedom." Cholada trusted Tino to make good choices and to be honest about communicating his feelings. Throughout the interview, it was clear that Tino felt very confident about himself as a young person. He was elected by the student body to be the all-school senator, and he was prepared to bring a male date to the high-school prom. With the support of Cholada, they confronted the principal about his decision to ban Tino from being a member of the cheer-leading squad. The supportive family environment enabled him to assert his sexual identity as a gay youth, hence establishing him as a role model for queer youth.

When Dave Drew, a thirty-year-old Vietnamese-German-English gay performance artist, was asked whether he felt that there were any cultural barriers to coming out to himself or to his biological/chosen family members. His response was as follows:

Cultural barriers ... coming out to myself -- no, not really, with all my extended family on my Vietnamese side still in Vietnam. They're not exposed to me. I used to go through a lot in my head [about] why my mom had never been back to Vietnam since she's left. I always thought it was because of me. Because I am way too much of a freak for her to go back there ... that kept me sort of confined.

Dave's response touched on his feelings of guilt around being a gay son. His belief that he was the reason his mother never returned to her "homeland" shows that he considered himself to be a burden, that he

felt that his queerness shamed his mother. Clearly, he believed that his queerness was not appropriate either to his mother's cultural background (Vietnamese) or to his own (half-Vietnamese). This left him feeling "sort of confined." Earlier in the interview, he brought up the issue of being a first son and the responsibility that he had towards his father: "I'm his first son [and I'm] turning out to be some weirdo faggot, you know, I think that sorta trips him out." He assumed that his father expected him to be a heterosexual man. As the son of an immigrant mother and a European American man, he was aware of society's judgement on inter-racial families, especially in the days when inter-racial marriages were illegal in many states. During the interview, it was clear that Dave recognized that his parents had had a difficult time with their multi-racial union, although he pointed out that the hardships endured by his mother (who had married a non-Roman Catholic, non-Vietnamese-speaking European American) were more difficult than were those of his father. In identifying as multi-racial and queer, Dave felt that, far from alleviating any societal pressure felt by his parents, he was actually increasing it. He took full responsibility for not being a "dutiful" son and for making his parents worry that, as an out gay man, he was a target for violence.

Religion

As I have mentioned, I did not include the topic of religion in my list of questions because I was not aware of its significance to the coming out process for queer Asians. This was due to my own experiences, for, although I was brought up as a Roman Catholic and attended an all-girls Roman Catholic school for eleven years in Hong Kong, I have never felt the need to reconcile my lesbian sexuality with my religious beliefs. Obtaining an education in schools where English is the primary language of instruction has always been a priority for middle-class children and parents in postcolonial Hong Kong. Most of these schools

are religious-based or are affiliated with religious denominations based in foreign countries. I saw my attendance at an English-speaking Roman Catholic school as a simple part of attaining good education. I memorized the doctrines of Roman Catholicism without taking them at all seriously. Within this milieu, sisterly affection was more tolerated than were male-female relationships. I recall numerous times when my classmate's boyfriend would wait for her at the school's gates. The next day, a teacher would approach her and give her a serious scolding. As a result of this, I perceived my lesbian identity to be more "acceptable" than a heterosexual identity. I was too young and naïve to think of legal consequences and societal pressures. I no longer consider myself a Roman Catholic.

The narrators mentioned religion a number of times and within different contexts. For example, Perveen Ali said that religion was one of the obstacles to her coming out to her family:

I didn't come out to my family because my mother belongs to a very, very conservative Christian church. And I have a younger brother and sister [and] I would like to play a part in their lives and help them to be able to survive in my lovely family. [I would] kind of like being a resource to them. I'm afraid that -- well, I know that if I were to come out to my family in that way, that I would be cut off from any communication with them. And it's very important to me have those links ... to my brother and sister.

Numerous times during the interview Perveen displayed a sense of protectiveness with regard to her siblings. As the eldest child, she felt responsible for maintaining family ties, and she feared that coming out as a bisexual would jeopardize her family relations. The sarcasm embedded in the words "my lovely family" was heartfelt, for she assumed that her parents would disown her should they learn of her sexual identity. Her bravery in participating in a public project such as *Leaving Silence* cannot be over-estimated. It was a rebellious act against her parents -- the price for which could have been the severing of all family ties.

Reflecting on her father's religious affiliation, Perveen posits that racism was a major reason why he became a Muslim.

My father -- it's very interesting. He was never extremely conservative or fundamentalist in his beliefs or practices ... until the past, maybe the past ten years. I think it's because he's really started confronting a lot of the racism he's experienced in this country, and the only way he can deal with [it] is by really clinging tightly to the culture or the community that he has created around [himself] -- in order to survive.

Perveen believes that her father chose to become involved with a religious community because it was all he could find:

I think one of the few resources he's found for himself has been his religion, his religious community ... There aren't many other Bengalis in Athens, Georgia, but there are a lot of Muslims. So he's really developed that community around himself and kind of protected himself [that way].

Perveen grew up with parents who did not communicate with each other due to religious differences. During the interview, she repeatedly stated the importance of maintaining communication between herself and her siblings. Although she explained that her father became a Muslim out of necessity, it being simply too difficult to be an Indian in Athens, Georgia, she did not say whether her father's decision was understood by every family member. It was difficult for me to understand how Perveen could identify as an "anti-oppression/liberation worker" while still remaining "oppressed" within her own family. It was as though she were counting on her professional and volunteer work to balance her inability to come out to her family. In other words, her work offered her a protected area -- an area that was off limits to her family members. Not unlike her father, Perveen turned to an activist community in order to reconcile her multiple selves.

Norma Timbang identified religion as one of the cultural values common to Filipino communities. In not going through the process of becoming Roman Catholic, she was "rebellious against [her] parents'

wishes." When she was asked about coming out, she immediately referred to religion as "a tradition" that was a "constraint" for her.

Interviewer: Do you feel that your parents stressed cultural values when you were growing up? And, if so, how did that [affect] your coming out?

Norma: Yeah, I was, um, the only child in my family who did not go through catechism. Or, you know, the process of being confirmed as a Catholic and all of that stuff. The only one who didn't have both my children christened or baptized.

Norma did not elaborate upon how her family felt about her stance towards catechism. She stated that, if religious teachings were useful, then they would teach people to respect one another. Norma was painfully aware of the lack of respect between her siblings and her parents, and, as a result, found herself questioning the validity of traditional religions. The fact that, when asked how her parents' cultural values affected her coming out process, Norma replied by mentioning catechism indicates a clear correlation between her cultural background and her parents' religion. To her, coming out brings up the issue of Roman Catholicism. When the interviewer asked her what being a bisexual Filipina meant to her, she replied:

It means that I [have] been and I am in the process of fighting all the constraints that have been placed upon me to live my life a certain way. And probably the most extensive of those constraints had to be my culture. Uh ... and fighting against ... um ... perspectives that have been propagated by religious and far right and other traditional perspectives.

In attempting to account for the effect of religion upon Asian queers, I read about You-Leng Leroy Lim, an Episcopal priest who grew up in Singapore, born to fundamentalist Christian Chinese parents (Eng and Hom 1998). When Lim was in Grade 1, he was taught to believe that a mother's love is the greatest form of giving. After attending college in the United States for more than ten years, Lim returned to Singapore to come out to his parents. He set aside one year from graduate school to go through this process. In one conversation he had with his parents,

they talked about how gayness meant that the devil had infiltrated his mind. He remembers his mother saying, "In the name of Jesus, may you never have a male lover." Although Lim did not elaborate upon the conversation or upon whether his father participated in it, he conveyed to us the searing pain of being religious, queer, and emotionally tied to your family. In recalling his days as a teenager, Lim said,

Later, as my attention to boys remained unabated, I started to hate myself. Clearly, if God had touched me with his own presence yet refused to hear my prayer for sexual change, I had to be despicable. (Eng and Hom 1998, 329)

Many times, Lim contemplated suicide. However, he finally found peace by attending a gay men's spirituality retreat, where he met others who had the same questions regarding the relationship between spirituality and a gay male identity. How does one integrate spirituality with queer sexuality? How does god's love manifest itself for queers among biblical doctrines that are interpreted as anti-gay by many of god's followers? At the retreat, Lim came to realize that returning home does not mean returning to one's family, church, or lover; rather, it means that God is "the uncontainable true home, and the self is the hearth and the burning fire" (332). Lim's experience points one possible way of reconciling spirituality with queer sexuality. Although he recognizes that religious institutions contribute to the systemic oppression of queers, Lim relies upon his own interpretation of doctrines and his own personal belief in God. Thus Lim provides hope to many queers who are struggling with their religious upbringing and beliefs.

In searching for writings that address feminism and religion, I came across Cheng Imm Tan. A senior associate minister at the Unitarian Universalist Urban Ministry and an organizer and co-founder of the Asian Women's Task Force Against Domestic Violence in Boston, Tan discusses the conflicts between her position as a feminist and her position as a

theologian. She is aware of sexism in religious institutions, the male identity of God, and male-dominated religious language. Furthermore, Tan problematizes Christianity's emphasis on dualism: good versus evil, soul versus body, and spirit versus matter (Shah 1997, 200-15). Tan became interested in Christianity after having been brought up within a mish-mash of religious traditions, ranging from Buddhism to Christianity. After she severed her ties with the Christian church, she began to differentiate between organized religion and spirituality. By reclaiming love for herself and for her cultural roots, Tan achieved a renewed sense of her whole self. Rather than following doctrines and masses, Tan was attracted to issues pertaining to social justice. As a community activist, she felt that it was too emotionally draining for her to continue her activist work without taking care of her spiritual needs. She began to explore the possibility of linking anti-oppression frameworks, particularly feminism, with spirituality. Tan found that it was only through the cultivation of a spiritual life that she could learn to love completely and to live her life well. And it was spiritual inspiration that enabled her to be active in the feminist and domestic violence movements.

Being in-between

Many of the narrators brought up the issue of "fitting in" when attempting to describe their situation as mixed-race queers. Being of mixed race has different meanings within different cultural and political contexts. Census data released by the US Census Bureau showed the percentage of residents who identified with two or more races as 2.4 percent of the national population. The percentages differ from one state to another in comparison with the state population size. For example, the state of Washington has a 3.6 percentage compared to a 4.7 percentage in the state of California. Although I cannot generalize on the inter-relations between mixed-race identities and queerness, I feel

that the crossing of racial boundaries might contribute to a more open attitude towards the crossing of gender lines. As the daughter of an Irish and French mother and an East Indian father, Sheila Batacharya (Oikawa, Falconer, and Decter 1994, 182) writes: "In white culture my identity as a woman of colour is erased. In a South Asian context my existence is traced to colonization. Racism precludes both of these realities." When being half white is linked to privilege, the dichotomy of white versus colour becomes problematic. Batacharya's analysis of privilege and oppression is complicated by the fact that her father experienced racism but had the privileges associated with masculinity, while her working-class mother experienced classism but had the privilege associated with whiteness. Batacharya's community activism was also affected by her mixed-race identity, as she questioned whether, having grown up in a white suburban neighbourhood with white neighbours and peers, she would be considered a woman of colour.

In commenting on the lack of a mixed heritage support group in Seattle, Washington, Tanith Songsook Kimsing, a thirty-one-year-old Korean-German-Swedish lesbian, said:

Because I think, I mean the Asian community is very great and accepting of mixed peoples, but still I was very apprehensive about it [i.e., the lesbian of colour support group] because I have been turned away before. Well. I mean. you're not a full woman of colour, therefore you can't sit in, and you're just, like, standing there like a dumb-ass.

She offered these comments on being queer and Asian:

Oh, about being queer and Asian. Anyway, well, I guess what I was saying just a few seconds ago is never 100 per cent like being queer and Asian. I don't know what that's really like because I always have that white element -- always. You know, I always have to think about that. And you know I [have] always tried being a lesbian in the white way -- I have. I don't know what it's like being an Asian lesbian, like 100 per cent, because my role models were always white.

Tanith's multi-racial identity made it clear to us that racial boundaries are not a simple matter of "black and white." Tanith's

ethnic composition -- Korean, German, and Swedish -- challenges any easy definition of who counts as being Asian American, or, indeed, as being European. Tanith "tried being a lesbian in the white way" because that was what allowed her to fit into the lesbian community in New Mexico, Arizona. When she attempted to join a queer Asian group, she was informed that she was not Asian enough. This shows how small, insular communities often set their own oppressive rules and boundaries. By not confronting essentialist assumptions of who can be Asian American, queer Asian American groups run the risk of establishing their own sets of racial hierarchies. Thus community groups that claim to be anti-oppressive often perpetuate discrimination in yet another guise. Therefore, it is crucial to confront ourselves and our community groups by working towards inclusivity and ensuring that silenced voices be heard.

Perveen also talked about feeling in-between:

Personally I don't feel like I've ever had the luxury of defining my life in narrow ways because I've always lived in-between, in-between everything. So it's very important to me to never create those boundaries. And especially because I do so much anti-oppression work, I feel like the more boundaries I create around myself and my identity, the more difficult it's going to be for me to empathize with other people or to see the subtleties in the ways oppression intersect, [how they] reinforce each other.

Being on the margins of communities, Tanith comments:

Yeah, couldn't fit into the white community ... being a lesbian [I couldn't fit into] the straight community. The Korean community totally rejected me, partly because I was half-white, and partly because they thought I was sick because I was a lesbian.

The feeling of being in-between, or on the margins, led Karen Maeda Allman to interrogate Asian American-ness. She described how taking the middle name of "Maeda" made her feel more Asian. Yet her experience of working in people of colour groups was frustrating because

she consistently had to prove her right to be there.

Interviewer: Can you give some examples of [the] prejudice you have to face within different organizations?

Karen: I'll be working with them, or they would look at me and say, "Well you know, you could pass for white anytime," which I think is a little strange [laughs] ... Or, you know, working in coalition with people of colour ... working along with them, and then all of a sudden figuring out that they think I'm Native American or something? And then they find out I'm Asian, and then, you know, we've [got] to deal with the whole ... Don't you Asians really want to be white people? ... But that's easier, I guess, if it's a group that's ... a more mixed group of people. It's easier for me than [when] we're all trying to be Asian American together, 'cause I always feel like I don't measure up to be[ing] Asian American enough.

Karen's response signifies a common assumption that Asian Americans are not really of mixed heritage -- they are Asians, and "Don't you Asians really want to be white people?" Being of mixed race -- in Karen's case, being Japanese European -- is commonly associated with being able to pass as a white person. This further complicates Karen's situation, as, within anti-oppression movements, her racial identity was viewed as that of the oppressor. Her visible right to be in people of colour groups was constantly challenged by others in those groups.

Involved in many advocacy groups, Juliana Pegues, a writer and activist, observed that organizations based on identity often have to deal with conflicts surrounding racial and class issues (Shah 1997). For example, an Asian and Pacific Islander lesbian and bisexual (APILB) group in Minneapolis folded after trying to tackle the issue of class within its membership. Members of the group were discussing the financial aid policy for a regional Asian and Pacific Islander lesbian and bisexual women's retreat. Principles pertaining to financial aid for registrants were questioned while a committee was set up to decide on the fee scale. One member felt that there was enough time for women who were coming to the conference to earn money for registration fees. She thought that the other conference organizers were being idealistic

in wanting to cover everyone's financial needs. At that point, another member called her a classist. This led to personal attacks being shouted back and forth, with the group failing to resolve the situation. Class dynamics and unrest eventually led to the dismantling of this APILB group. Pegues's description of this group demonstrates the inter-relationships among class, race, and sexuality. The group came together under the common banner of being queer Asian and Pacific Islander, but class differences were not directly addressed, and led to its demise (Shah 1997, 3-16).

As is clear from Tanith's comments regarding being mixed-race in a lesbian of colour group, and from Perveen's comments regarding the queer Asian community's reluctance to include refugees, community boundaries are at times rigid. This, of course, is in order to protect the interests of the larger membership. In order to get around this problem, Pugues (1997) suggests that identity-based organizations focus on specific issues and expand their boundaries by reaching out to political allies. On 25 April 1995, four political community-based organizations participated in a multi-issue action against cuts implemented by New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani and New York City Governor George Pataki. The Committee Against Anti-Asian Violence (CAAAV) protested against police brutality and racial violence. ACT UP demonstrated against funding cuts in the areas of public health care and AIDS-related issues. In the meantime, Coalition Against the Cuts demonstrated against the dramatic decrease of public education budgets, and Housing Works protested against the lack of social housing. On the day of action, these four organizations blocked the exits of three city tunnels and made a powerful public statement regarding their joint mission towards social justice (Eng and Hom 1998, 67-69). In other words, a commitment to social change, rather than ethnic and/or sexual identity, should be the focal point of group membership (Shah 1997, 12).

With regard to fitting into a particular community, Bookda

Gheisar, the thirty-nine-year-old director of a cross cultural health care program, discussed the difficulty of returning to Iran and living as a lesbian. Her family believed that she became a lesbian because she went to the United States. They believed that her sexual identity was a product of Western cultural influence, that she "became" a lesbian as a result of cultural assimilation.

Interviewer: How did you respond to [your family] writing off [your lesbianism as a matter of] assimilation?

Bookda: Well, it was very, very painful because the whole issue of assimilation was painful enough already. I was so confused by then ... this was now 1987/88, when they all moved to Toronto and I came out to the rest of my family. By then, I was so confused about what was happening to me. I don't seem to be going back and living there. There are ways that I am very bicultural, and there are ways that I am becoming more assimilated than I want to recognize. And there are things that I prefer about living here, that I like better here. And what does that mean and who am I? Where am I ever going to fit? There's not any one community that I fit into. So I'm ... going to be lonely for the rest of my life.

Fitting in becomes an issue once a community defines its boundaries and establishes its values and norms. The exclusion of progressive groups at the fifteenth annual India Day Parade in New York City in August 1995 is a prime example of the conflict between cultural values and political beliefs. As the parade organizers, the Federation of Indian Associations (FIA) banned the participation of the following organizations: Sakhi for South Asian Women (an organization that works with battered South Asian women and is dedicated to social change), the South Asian Lesbian and Gay Association (SALGA), and the South Asian AIDS Action (SAAA) group. These groups were excluded on the grounds that they did not represent FIA's values.

In an interview with a reporter, the president of FIA said, "This is the India Day Parade. It has to do with Indian culture, traditional Indian values." He went on to explain that it was not homosexuality that he objected to but, rather, the placards that "advertised" sexuality. It was not surprising that SALGA was FIA's prime target

group. FIA's president believed that their values were simply not "Indian values." In any case, FIA believed that these three progressive groups jeopardized the cultural identity of India, and their activism was believed to amount to the propagation of individual beliefs and, hence, to have no basis in a collective consciousness. Commenting on the exclusion of these groups, FIA vice-president Ram Suchdev said: "The cultural event of the parade is not the place for redefining notions of family and the individual; this political work is considered disrespectful and alien to the culture" (Shah 1997, 48). Suchdev's notion of Indian culture completely "disappears" lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgendered South Asians. This person is supposed to "represent" the South Asian community in New York, yet, in an alleged attempt to "protect" South Asian culture, he denies the existence of all queer South Asians and their efforts at community organizing. The fact that the queer South Asian organization Trikone (which was established in 1986 by Savir Das and Arvind Kumar) publishes a newsletter and actively participates in both queer and non-queer cultural festivals means nothing to Suchdev.

The four common themes in the narratives: (1) generational differences with regard to the use of the word "queer," (2) the relationship between achievement and family acceptance, (3) being in-between, and (4) religion, illustrate key areas that were of concern to the participants. Although these four themes were not definitive of queer Asian American lives, they stood out as what were influencing factors for queer Asian Americans but could have been commonplace for non-queers. I allude to this because *Leaving Silence* as an educational tool raised pertinent issues into what constituted queer Asian American identities. The analysis of these four issues were specific to the participants yet shared by many other queer folks. The primary goal of the exhibit is to raise public awareness of issues facing queer Asian Americans. I will explore how the exhibit expands the boundaries of

pedagogy and asserts itself into the realm of public pedagogy in the following chapter, "The Pedagogy of a Travelling Exhibit."

CHAPTER 5: THE PEDAGOGY OF A TRAVELLING EXHIBIT

If the purpose of learning/teaching determines the type of knowledge produced, implicit in this knowledge is always a notion of political agency. The agency, whether it is active or passive, of a producer or of a consumer, varies according to the goal -- which may either be social change or the continuation of the status quo.²¹
 -- Himani Bannerji

Pedagogy, within the context of formal education, is often referred to as the method of instruction that occurs within school and university classrooms. It points to both "intentional teaching and measurable learning," which occur in "formally named educational institutions" (Luke 1996, 4-5). A student's success is commonly determined by using evaluative tools such as examinations and assignments. Educators are expected to fulfil the role of experts and to provide knowledge to students within specific institutional settings. If the boundaries of pedagogy could be widened to include learning processes that occur in non-traditional places, then educators would be able to broaden the scope of their teaching and to establish a closer relationship with their students. If our lens becomes narrow, then so, too, does our focus. Carmen Luke (1996, 7), a feminist educator and editor of *Feminisms and Pedagogies of Everyday Life*, tells why she pursues a broad pedagogical stance: "Learning and teaching, in my estimation, are the very intersubjective core relations of everyday life. They exist beyond the classroom, are always gendered and intercultural."

In this chapter I argue that *Leaving Silence: Queer Asian/Pacific Islander Oral History Exhibit* facilitated discussions pertaining to the complexities of race, class, and sexuality through its legitimization of

²¹ Himani Bannerji, *Thinking Through: Essays on Feminism, Marxism, and Anti-Racism* (Toronto: Women's Press, 1995), 64-65.

queer Asian scholarship.²² The fact that it is a travelling exhibit gives *Leaving Silence* a diasporic quality that makes it amenable to Luke's form of pedagogy. Drawing upon the fields of feminist pedagogy and cultural studies (particularly in education), I, like Luke, urge educators to look beyond classroom curricula to find alternative ways of interpreting the world around us. Educators should bring in organizers from various social movements and address marginalized issues -- those issues that have routinely been deemed insignificant within, or inappropriate to, canonical domains. Foremost among these are issues of race, sexuality, and class. The search for anti-oppression identifiers is an open-ended one, as globalization forces us to reassess our tendency to look at the world in terms of simple oppositional stances. No longer can we ignore how social, cultural, and political factors intersect in our lives and the lives of others. We must create forums within classroom spaces that will allow us to share our knowledge and to teach lessons in community organizing. In this regard, *Leaving Silence* prompts us to consider grassroots community projects as educational tools and as a means of raising public awareness of social and political concerns.

In analyzing *Leaving Silence* I am, in essence, analyzing a community project. The collective effort behind putting this exhibit together was initiated by individual activists. They began the coordination process by approaching community agencies for their sponsorship and endorsement. Grant applications were written and funds were raised through individual donors and organizations. As word spread about the exhibit, experienced community activists came forward to share their knowledge, and newcomers came forward to learn organizing skills. Moreover, various agencies, social groups, and individuals generated new ideas and established partnerships. Asian Counseling and Referral

²² Although the title of the exhibit claimed to be inclusive of Pacific Islanders, the exhibit itself did not

Services, a primary mental health services provider collaborated with Seattle Chinatown/International District Preservation and Development Association, a regional cultural preservation agency, to endorse and support the exhibit by donating staff resources and "in-kind" services such as space for Working Advisory Committee meetings and access to photocopiers. Another key example of cooperation involved the sharing of skills between Bob Shimabukuro (a founder of Asian Pacific AIDS Services and a community leader of the Japanese American community in Seattle) and younger activists on marketing strategies and networking in the multi-ethnic communities. In other words, the coordination process became an educational forum within which people came together through their commitment to raise public awareness of queer Asian lives.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty (cited in Roman and Eyre 1997, xxvi), a feminist theorist who specializes in globalization, offers her insights on education in the preface to *Dangerous Territories*:

If the academy, the classroom, and other educational contexts are not mere instructional sites, but are fundamentally political and cultural sites that represent accommodations and contestations over knowledge by differently empowered social constituencies, then the processes and practices of education lead to profoundly significant notions of self, identity, and community.

By establishing the connection between "educational contexts" and "political and cultural sites," Mohanty is able to point out how "self, identity, and community" are shaped in both locations. Similarly, the process of producing *Leaving Silence* created an activist site within which organizers strategized about how to offer public education on queer subjects. As project coordinator, I also participated in the group exercise of negotiating and defining racialized identities. We elaborated upon our own definitions of what it meant to be queer and Asian. During the course of bringing up our individual identities and

demonstrate this commitment. The reasons for this are explained in the introduction to this thesis.

political beliefs, we argued over terminology and representation. We challenged our own and each other's assumptions and, at other times, validated some parts of ourselves. For example, most of the Working Advisory Committee members identified as Asian American. When Perveen Ali brought up the importance of locating queer politics within an international context, I immediately recognized the importance of including her narrative in the exhibit. I noticed a lack of first generation immigrant perspectives in the interviews. By accepting Perveen's narrative, I felt that my personal Canadian immigrant experience was somehow being included in this community project. In volunteering for the project, Working Advisory Committee members demonstrated their commitment towards building the capacity to work together within the Queer Asian community. Yet, at the same time, their participation helped them to gain external recognition from supporters in mainstream Asian community organizations and more white-identified queer groups. Through this collective defining of the project, we came to know our allies and the barriers facing us. We developed a support network within Seattle's Chinatown/International District communities and established partnerships with various non-profit agencies. On a more personal level, I came to develop a more secure identity as an Asian lesbian. I also began to recognize the boundaries of various communities and the struggles over knowledge that occur within them.

The Exhibit Format and Its Functions

Educational exhibits have often been created to provide audiences with information on multiple forms of textual display and visual imagery. The information contained in *Leaving Silence* is condensed, and the combination of text and images renders the subject matter quite accessible. The organizers and myself were conscious of keeping the text on the panels in an accessible format. In paraphrasing the narratives, I tried to use easy-to-understand phrases and simple words. Working

Advisory Committee members also provided feedback on the edited narratives.

Judith Barry (1991, 92), a writer and artist who specializes in public art, discusses using exhibits to attract public audiences:

Moreover, an exhibition, in that it is site-specific and confronts the viewer's passage through time and space while arranging a mass of material into a more or less coherent demonstration of a particular point of view, is in a rather complex and interactive way about the stimulation and sharing of ideas.

Indeed, this could have been written with regard to *Leaving Silence*, which attempts to portray the complex subject of queer Asian lives through a selection of narratives and accompanying images. Individual narratives were situated within specific social, cultural, political, and historical contexts. Similarly, when viewers read a narrative on an exhibit panel, they brought their understanding of the subject matter with them. They were located within their own web of social relations, where their genders and their cultural and economic backgrounds influenced how they interpreted the narratives. The exhibit created an interactive environment within which viewers could exercise their agency in reading the subject matter contained on the panels. The exhibit space was constructed so as to allow room for viewers to move around and to read those texts in which they were most interested. It created an alternate kind of learning environment, one in which "informal learning" could take place (Casella 1999, 118). In other words, *Learning Silence* became a site of public learning.

Leaving Silence's public display space created a site where viewers' opinions on queerness could be mediated and negotiated as they reacted to the contents of the narratives. This space was open to anyone who had an interest in learning more about queer Asian lives. It was an invitational space, and it encouraged the public to view and interact with a queer Asian community. If the exhibit provoked tension, this was

intentional, and we, as organizers, expected it. There was one incident during which library users spat at the exhibit. The library staff cleaned the panel and informed me about what had happened. There were no recorded disruptions at Cunningham Hall in the University of Washington Women Center or at the Heart-to-Art Gallery in Seattle. I believe that both locations were targeted at specific audiences and that this, to a certain extent, protected the exhibit. For example, I assume that visitors to the University of Washington venue would, primarily, be students, university teaching staff and other members affiliated with the institution. And, as for the Heart-to-Art Gallery, it is located in Capitol Hill -- a queer-friendly neighbourhood. We believed that locating the exhibit in central public areas was an ideal way of educating the public about queer Asian lives.

Commenting on the accessibility of exhibits, Barry (1991, 93) has this to say:

By greatly enlarging photographs originally reproduced in books or magazines, [exhibits] succeeded in transforming a visual text into something closer to mass propaganda or advertising. In this respect, [they] functioned like an inversion of reading, as a type of fantasy experience sustained by a cinematic scale of imagery and by the potential for group reception.

The photos in *Leaving Silence* were offered as visual evidence of queer Asian lives. Combined with the narratives, they served a serious function: to provide the public with documentation of the lived experiences of marginalized populations. The narrators' willingness to face public exposure, both textually and visually, strengthened our collective struggle for queer Asian visibility. The interview transcripts, the audiotapes, the black-and-white photo portraits, and the film stock all became records that documented the lives of members of the queer Asian community. This collection of data constitutes our first step towards keeping records of, and maintaining continuity within, our activist communities. They provide a link between different

generations of social movements. And they provide us with insights into current and past organizing patterns, the successes and failures of various initiatives. This being the case, the information we gathered cannot help but be instrumental in the formation of a healthier and more self-affirming social movement (Shah 1998, 153).

What makes a cultural studies approach to pedagogy challenging to the traditional educational discourse is the shifting of what counts as "formal learning sites" (Casella 1999, 117-18). Instead of focusing on classrooms or more controlled learning environments, pedagogy in the cultural studies vein focuses on broadening our definitions of what counts as education. When I talk about a cultural studies approach to pedagogy, I am referring to what Leslie Roman and Linda Eyre (1997) call "a feminist materialist politics of cultural studies." Roman and Eyre argue that the production of cultural commodities is capitalist in nature and is intended for certain audiences. With this in mind, I came to question everyday popular cultural forms such as magazines, films, and television programs. These cultural forms

are involved intimately in securing and producing the consent of women and men to particular hegemonic meanings for gender (the relational categories of femininity and masculinity at a particular historic juncture) and sexual difference. At stake in the struggles and contestations over these meanings are not only textual representations of femininity and gender relations in particular cultural commodities, but also their place and significance in the lives of the actual women and men who consume, use, and make sense of them in the context of their daily practices and social relations. (Roman and Eyre 1997, 3-4)

For example, the popularity of director Ang Lee's 1993 movie, *The Wedding Banquet*, brought North American audiences to theatres to learn about what it means to be a Taiwanese-Chinese gay man. The story revolves around Gao Wai Tung, who lives in the United States with his white American lover, Simon. His parents often ask about his marriage plans and pressure him to have a family of his own. Bowing to his parents' wishes, Tung approaches Wei, a tenant in one of his apartments.

Since Wei needs an immigrant visa, they agree to marry: this would work well for both of them as it would provide her with a visa and him with his parents' approval. Unfortunately, Wei gets pregnant during a sexual episode with Tung following the wedding banquet. Through meandering, humorous twists involving secrets and lies, the story ends happily, with Simon, Tung, and Wei agreeing to raise the child and with Tung's father accepting his son's gay relationship. The power of *The Wedding Banquet* lies in its ability to blend humour with the serious issue of being a gay Asian man. A gay friend of mine's supportive siblings showed the movie to their elderly parents in order to gently introduce the topic of being a gay Asian man. After viewing the movie, they discussed the story and what it would mean for them to have a gay son. Since then, my friend has been able to slowly drop more hints pertaining to his sexual identity into family conversations.

In particular, the cultural studies approach to pedagogy enables us to understand the potential material effects of community projects such as *Leaving Silence*. Drawing the links between popular cultural forms and their function in destabilizing meanings, Roman and Eyre highlight the possibility of social transformation occurring in unlikely sites. A clear example of this is the use of bus-stop billboards as a venue to spread safer-sex messages. In San Francisco, the latest studies by the Department of Public Health showed a rise of HIV infection among younger gay men. Therefore, a marketing campaign targeting this particular audience used sexually explicit images and the slogan "How do you know what you know?" on bus-stop billboards and advertisements along the sides of buses. *Leaving Silence*, as a popular cultural form, challenges its viewers to reassess their notions of what it means to be queer and Asian. And, in so doing, it reveals its potential as a tool for social change.

Ronnie Casella (1999, 119) comments on the incorporation of cultural studies into pedagogy:

Ethnographic fixations on "sites" -- such as a school -- have been taken up by researchers with additional emphases on the more dispersive "places" where education occurs: in our movie theaters, for example, or through computers and videos, or in popular educational endeavours such as museum-going and educational travel.

In looking for ways to understand *Leaving Silence* as a public pedagogical tool, the field of cultural studies in education proposes looking at how mass media and popular culture contribute to our understanding of everyday lives. We, as individuals, are obviously influenced by those cultural forces that determine how we construct our interpretations of the world. Popular cultural forces can occur in the form of music, films, popular novels, television series, or fashion magazines. By carefully analyzing the roles social institutions, the media, and educational establishments play in marginalizing certain populations, we can point out how, through the fomenting of various curricula and agendas, they systematically determine who is favoured and who is not.

The Queer Asian Subject On Exhibit

Cultural critic Charmaine Perkins (1997, 247-48), in her essay "Any More Colourful We'd Have To Censor It," discusses the term "popular":

By the term popular, I intend to convey the various meanings of generally accepted assumptions, what usually passes for common sense, a kind of homogenized public knowledge, as well as the way in which information/knowledge is encoded and transmitted via mass media to form and inform popular opinion, and indeed, shape consciousness.

The focus of pedagogy upon formal educational contexts undermines our ability to understand the role popular culture plays in informing our consciousness. In using the word "queer" in the press releases and, more important, the exhibit's mission statement, we put ourselves at

risk of encountering the popular understandings of "queer." As has been mentioned, the word "queer" has different connotations for different generations: for an older generation, the term is a reminder of homophobic abuse, for a younger generation, it functions as a positive affirmation of self (Smith 1992, 22). The word also has different meanings and connotations when used by heterosexuals and when used by lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and the transgendered. One of the purposes of *Leaving Silence* was to educate the public about the word "queer" and the meaning it has for those who identify as queer and Asian. In the exhibit's introductory booklet I offered the following explanation for our use of the term:

The word "queer" was traditionally used as a derogatory term toward lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgendered. By reclaiming the word "queer", we are now using [it] to express our sexual identities instead of having someone else naming our sexual identities. Literally, the word "queer" is also inclusive of lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgendered.

So, does *Leaving Silence* amount to what Judith Barry (1991, 93) refers to as "mass propaganda or advertising"? I think it does not; rather, I think it subverts mainstream propaganda by popularizing the queer and racialized subject. The presence of queer Asian subjects leads to debates around racialized and gendered identities, and this, in turn, problematizes notions about what constitutes appropriate subject matter for a public exhibit.

Leaving Silence effectively displays a usually hidden subject. It takes this subject and magnifies it through a selection of photographs and narratives. In so doing, it directly confronts the taboo of homosexuality within queer Asian communities. Richard Fung, a queer Asian video artist and activist based in Toronto, produced a video entitled *Dirty Laundry*. This video depicts homoeroticism among male Chinese workers during the construction of the Canadian railroads in the late nineteenth century (Lee, cited in Eng and Hom 1998, 192-93). Among

Chinese, the term "dirty laundry" denotes a forbidden matter, a shameful happening or an untouchable and unmentionable family issue. *Leaving Silence* is an attempt to dispel queerness as "dirty laundry" and to assert its legitimacy.

Clearly, the public declaration of same-sex desire is a dangerous matter for Asian lesbian, gays, bisexuals, and transgendered people. The risk of losing family support, never mind anything else, is enough to make one reconsider her/his decision to come out. Elaborating on the importance of family support, Richard Fung (cited in Eng and Hom 1998, 118) has this to say:

As is the case for many other people of color and especially immigrants, our families and our ethnic communities are a rare source of affirmation in a racist society. In coming out, we risk (or feel that we risk) losing this support, though the ever-growing organizations of lesbian and gay Asians have worked against this process of cultural exile.

By taking part in a public demonstration of the queer Asian subject, *Leaving Silence's* narrators, their friends, and their families showed tremendous courage. They took the risk of being ostracized by their communities and by their loved ones, and they took the risk of losing their jobs, housing, and even their lives.

Facilitating Dialogues within the Public Sphere

Referring to the recent increased media coverage of feminist movements and lesbian issues in Taiwan, Deborah Tze-Lan Sang (cited in Yang 1999, 135) comments:

The public sphere in Taiwan has become a site of contestation between different discourses: scientific normalization, patriarchal family values, sensationalism, feminist and queer academic theories, and the liberatory self-representation of a new imagined community of lesbians.

By locating the exhibit in public spaces, we generated as much dialogue as we could over what it means to be queer and Asian. And we

invited both negative and positive feedback. In Seattle, the exhibit was primarily covered by ethnic media press such as *Northwest Nikkei*, the *International Examiner*, and the *Northwest Asian Weekly*. The media coverage tended to be supportive of the project. One of the main reasons for this, of course, involves the leaders of the ethnic community, who, early on, endorsed the project. However, when the exhibit was shown in Portland, Oregon, controversies surrounding it covered the editorial pages of the *Oregonian* and the *Asian Reporter*. A columnist in the *Oregonian*, Steve Duin, openly attacked the exhibit as a ridiculous form of self-expression. In his words, the exhibit was "a timely reminder [of the] morbid preoccupation with self" (*The Sunday Oregonian*, 18 May 1997, D1). In response, Leslie Griep, member of the board of Asian and Pacific Islander Lesbians and Gays, wrote:

The purpose of this exhibit is not introspection or being obsessed with self or "to hoot and holler and embrace our exclusivity" ... it is about how increased understanding of ourselves and each other affects human relationships. The exhibit is about breaking through invisibility, misconceptions and stereotypes about Asians and queers. (*The Oregonian*, 28 May 1997, Letters to Editors)

One of the pedagogical values of *Leaving Silence* lies in its marketing strategy, its ability to reach many communities and to inform them about issues relating to race and queerness. Fortunately, most of the members of the Working Advisory Committee were already associated with community agencies and had established links with various local newspaper publishers. This, of course, facilitated our attempts to publicize the exhibit.

Leaving Silence is an educational tool, and it is our hope that it will continue to be used to combat the sensationalizing of queer sexualities. The exhibit tried to normalize queer Asian lives by publicizing a series of issues that affect the queer Asian community. This was our response to the way in which mainstream society denies the

fact that queer individuals lead "normal" daily lives -- lives that involve many of the same everyday activities as do those of everyone else. Policy makers and others in positions of power continue to see queer populations as special interest groups rather than as people who are consistently and systematically denied social justice.

Community agencies, art collectives, and individual political artists have organized public art installations and poster campaigns in order to address the intersection of race, class, and sexuality among Asian and Pacific Islander communities. The public nature of these projects succeeded in bringing what is perceived to be a private affair into the public realm. The commonly held view of queer sexuality -- "it's okay that you're that way, as long as you keep it in your bedroom" -- is challenged by the "flaunting" stance taken up by public projects. For example, two anti-homophobia poster campaigns targeted the mainstream East Asian and Southeast Asian communities in Vancouver, British Columbia, and the Asian and Pacific Islander communities in Seattle, Washington. Both of these campaigns brought public attention to the existence of queer Asians and Pacific Islanders,²³ and both posters depicted over 100 community leaders and activists -- both queer-identified and heterosexual-identified -- who had come together to support the elimination of homophobia. They also paved the way for similar visibility campaigns.

Mediating Activism in Educational Research

A severe notion of privacy, that what one "does" in private should be of little consequence in public. The fact is that schools mediate the discourses of private and public work to leave intact the view that (homo)sexualities must be hidden. Moreover, the insistence that sexuality is to be confined to

²³ *United Against Homophobia* was coordinated by a coalition of community organizations in Seattle, Washington. Most agencies involved with this poster campaign were also active contributors to the *Leaving Silence* exhibit. Modelled after *United Against Homophobia*, *Diverse City* was a poster campaign organized by the Asian Society for the Intervention of AIDS, a Vancouver-based agency that provided HIV/AIDS prevention education to East Asian and Southeast Asian populations.

the private sphere reduces sexuality to the literal and specific sexual practices one performs, as if experimentation with sexual conduct were an equal opportunity experience. (Britzman, cited in Castell and Bryson 1997, 192)

In assessing the pervasive force of homophobia in our society, we must ask how our public education system perpetuates discriminating attitudes towards, and measures against, lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgendered persons. School discussions pertaining to sexuality are still confined to heterosexuality and the nuclear family. This type of exclusive curriculum clearly contributes to a lack of understanding of queer issues. The mere mention of a queer subject is enough to evoke defensive reactions from parents and teachers. A clear example of this may be seen in the reaction of the Surrey School Board to the attempt to introduce three books that looked favourably upon same-sex relationships. The board insisted that these three books be banned. In April 1997, James Chamberlain, a Surrey teacher, submitted *Asha's Mums*, *Belinda's Bouquet*, and *One Dad, Two Dads, Brown Dads, Blue Dads* for approval for use in kindergarten and Grade 1 classrooms. The board members voted four to two to ban the books from all schools in the Surrey district. Even though eighteen out of twenty families in Chamberlain's class petitioned in favour of retaining the books in the curriculum, the Surrey School Board proceeded to conduct a survey of all parents of elementary school children in Surrey. The survey asked one question: "Do you agree with the use of materials such as books, videos and/or presenters from the Gay and Lesbian Educators of BC for classroom instruction for Kindergarten through Grade 7?" There was only space for a "yes or no" answer. The British Columbia Human Rights Commission later ruled that the survey was discriminatory as it unfairly targeted gays and lesbians. How do we mediate between the values of anti-oppression workers and those of mainstream educational research and practice? How can progressive educators help to create a safe space for the queer subject?

Feminist cultural studies educators attempt to "experiment with new models for teaching and learning [-- models] that better connect what occurs in the classroom to efforts at social transformation" (Hytten 1999, 541). Strategies can range from curricular choices to actively listening to students who are participating in progressive social movements. Feminist educators have tried to bring social activism into their pedagogical practice; they have continuously sought to increase the activist content in their teaching materials despite institutional barriers; they have invited social activists and community activists to give guest lectures and seminars; and they have encouraged students to focus their research on street-based activities and community projects. I believe that, if educators and students acknowledge each other as consumers and critical readers of social messages, then this could have far-reaching implications for the classroom. For example, in encouraging students to obtain academic credit by volunteering in a non-profit community-based organization, they can test their academic knowledge and gain valuable skills in negotiating the academic/community balance.

Furthermore, feminism has contributed to a critical analysis of power relations within educational institutions. Feminist pedagogy, in particular, demands the close investigation of patriarchal power relations and their effect on social institutions. It encourages both teachers and students to locate themselves within a network of gendered, racialized, political, and cultural relations. It also asks us to recognize the reality of a "patriarchal model of pedagogy," which Carmen Luke (1996, 284) defines as consisting of "hierarchy, canonical authority, objectivism, and competitive individualism." Feminist pedagogy problematizes the way in which knowledge is produced. Feminist pedagogues fight to make people aware of the power structures inherent within our institutions and our gendered identities. They recognize the importance of feminist scholarship, and they practise a pedagogy that

involves a deep understanding of the interconnections between racism, sexism, homophobia, classism, and ableism. Such work, exemplified in Roman and Eyre's (1997) feminist materialist approach to cultural studies, is clearly relevant to the analysis of *Leaving Silence*.

Recently, feminist pedagogic practice has focused on the effects of globalization and diminishing economic borders upon a liberating educational practice. Chandra Talpade Mohanty (cited in Roman and Eyre 1997, xvi) highlights the urgent need for feminist educators to create "truly democratic public spaces where people of all 'races,' classes, genders, and sexualities are authorized to act as citizens -- to understand, organize, and demand justice and equity." *Leaving Silence*, as a community project, is an attempt to mobilize individuals who are committed to advancing the rights of queer populations. The project was coordinated on the basis of a democratic vision that assumed the importance of public participation. We did not create *Leaving Silence* as a project with a specifically woman-centred agenda; however, we recognize that its collaboration and production processes are demonstrative of feminist principles. Our interviewing strategy made use of participatory interviewing techniques that value self-reflexivity and reciprocity. In choosing the narratives, we focused on diversity. In raising the issue of what it means to belong to a racial and sexual minority, *Leaving Silence*, as its title implies, helped to render queer Asians both visible and vocal.

If education is the way to decolonize knowledges, then we need to critically examine our pedagogical practices and the educational institutions behind them. We also need to address differences within their cultural and historical contexts as well as within school curricula. And we need to challenge our assumptions as well as those of our colleagues and students. Feminist pedagogy has continued to encourage students and educators alike to practise anti-oppression values. It has also pointed to the need to examine the purpose of

research dedicated to social change. bell hooks (1994, 194), a feminist educator, film, and popular culture critic, suggests that educators should be held responsible for providing students with knowledge that raises social consciousness and encourages them to view life with a critical eye. In addition, she proposes that feminist educators "have always recognized the legitimacy of a pedagogy that dares to subvert the mind/body split and allow us to be whole in the classroom, and as a consequence wholehearted" (ibid.). We can create a learning space that includes emotions and desire rather than one that rejects them as illogical -- a learning space that allows open discussions on subject matters that evoke physical reactions, regardless of anger or sadness. In linking the mind and the body, the process of learning becomes more human. This learning environment can open pathways that will lead us to unfamiliar and forbidden territories, such as openly disclosing one's feelings about what is being taught within a classroom setting. As a result, learning become an exercise in making sense of subject matter through both our intellectual faculties and our sensory receptors.

Leaving Silence attempts to augment the capacity of oppressed communities to mobilize around social and political issues. From the exhibit's inception to its display as an exhibit, it brought different members in Seattle's Chinatown/International District and the local queer Asian community together to share the same vision in raising queer Asian visibility. Community members contributed to the project by donating funds, offering in-kind services, publicizing the exhibit and volunteering on Advisory Committees. We began to organize, to visualize, and to join hands as a team. We attempted to reach out to isolated individuals who were in need of social support networks. To many of us, being involved with *Leaving Silence* meant accepting a fundamental responsibility to work for social changes other than those focused solely on queer Asian visibility. We want more than queer Asian images, instead we want to feel the impact of reaching out to public audiences

for raising awareness about queer Asian issues. The project brought us together as a community, and it recruited us to mobilize for future political fights against discrimination and injustice, such as demonstrations against welfare reform and gentrification of the Seattle Chinatown/International District. In this regard, our attempt to seek social justice for queer Asians owes much to the women's movement, which, for decades, has fought to liberate women of all classes, sexual orientations, and colours.

The Pedagogy of a Travelling Exhibit

Other than crossing geographical borders and relocating exhibit spaces (Casella 1999, 118), what does a travelling exhibit entail? The travelling aspect of *Leaving Silence* had deep significance for the analysis of race, class, and gender identities. Being diasporic in nature, this exhibit highlighted the fact that queer Asians exist everywhere. Being movable, *Leaving Silence* could cross state/provincial borders and bring its subject matter to limitless public arenas. As its physical and social environments changed, it was able to bring its message to different crowds and potentially open up various interpretations of what it means to be queer and Asian. As Carmen Luke (1996, 3) suggests, "meaning is never guaranteed, fixed, or unproblematically shared among social agents." Thus the impact of *Leaving Silence* could be as diverse as the communities in which it was displayed, and the readings of the narratives could be as complex as the changing landscapes. In recognizing the need for wider public education on the subject of queer Asians, we submitted the exhibit to the people at Exhibit Touring Services (based at Eastern Washington University) in order to take advantage of their expertise in showcasing exhibits across the United States. We believe that the fact that *Leaving Silence* was a community project made the joint message of anti-homophobia and anti-racism more effective than it might otherwise have been. This is because

the community nature of the exhibit ensured its wide reception and, thus, an increased awareness of queer Asian sexualities.

Leaving Silence visited different public sites and was received by various audiences. It was first displayed on the main floor of the downtown Seattle Public Library. We chose the library for obvious reasons: it is both a central resource for those seeking knowledge and a public gathering place. Displayed on the library's main floor, the exhibit was provided with a maximum degree of visibility. The fact that the library's administration accepted *Leaving Silence* for display served to legitimize queer Asian American sexuality and to establish it as valid subject matter.

In viewing *Leaving Silence* as a travelling piece of documentation, I am attempting to investigate the potential of a travelling pedagogy -- a pedagogy that challenges fixed sites (for learning) and stable meanings. Not only did the physical environment of the display change, but so did the sites of sharing and learning. This points to the importance of changing contexts and fluid readings with regard to understanding queer Asian (and, indeed, any) lives, for no life is static.

In conclusion, the travelling exhibit format of *Leaving Silence* facilitated discussions on the subject of being queer and Asian. This community educational project challenges educators to create forums within which to expose non-mainstream subject matter and to develop a pedagogical practice that will responsibly address issues pertaining to social justice. Through increasing queer Asian visibility in the public realm, we became aware of the potential of travelling pedagogy. *Leaving Silence* demonstrates one possible method of mobilizing against oppressive/repressive socio-cultural institutions.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

I like to think of my work as creating a private conversation with each person, no matter how public each work is and no matter how many people are present.²⁴
 --- Maya Lin

Most of architect, sculptor and artist, Maya Lin's public memorials and works create private spaces for reflection and mourning in otherwise public venues. Located in public sites, her works symbolize historical moments and the passage of time. Although the nature of *Leaving Silence: Queer Asian and Pacific Islander Oral History Exhibit* is very different from a public memorial, it does engage viewers by creating an internal dialogue between them and the narrator whose words appear on the exhibit panel. The exhibit's organizers, volunteers and narrators present a "private" topic -- being queer and Asian and Pacific Islander -- to public audiences.

This thesis raises the question of how the *Leaving Silence* exhibit enhances our understanding of queer Asian American lives. It also asks how a queer Asian American subject fits into the wider scheme of pedagogy. By documenting the exhibit, this thesis seeks to fill the void in queer Asian American scholarship and to set the ground for further research. This work is a result of a merger between community activism and academic scholarship, and it seeks to show that community projects are subjects worthy of academic study. Moreover, I contend that *Leaving Silence* functions as an educational tool that enables us to fight homophobia and, by extension, various other forms of oppression. By bringing narratives and images to public audiences, the exhibit showed not only that queer Asian Americans exist, but also that their experiences are valid. In bridging the gap between community activism and academia, this thesis illustrates the need for further social activist research.

As a case study of an Asian American community's efforts to dispel homophobia, this thesis makes a contribution to Asian American social justice movements. It provides one more resource that enables educators and students alike to learn how a critical socio-cultural issue can bring communities together. And it offers a model that can be replicated in other communities. In my view, one of the reasons that *Leaving Silence* was so successful was that it involved the queer Asian American community in both its planning and implementation processes. It follows that the documentation of these processes will help people in other communities to plan their own exhibits and to vocalize their own political issues.

In analyzing the *Leaving Silence* exhibit I was able to bring to light the racialized, gendered, socio-cultural, and political aspects of being queer and Asian. Ultimately, I hope that this work functions as a means of enabling people to mobilize their communities to fight homophobia and racism. This thesis is built upon the conviction that it is possible to promote social change through education. It is meant to raise awareness of queer Asian issues and to emphasize the necessity of promoting anti-homophobia through education.

The thesis is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1, "Queering the Pacific Northwest," traces the development of the exhibit, from the initial recruitment of narrators to its display in public spaces. In providing this background, I specify the key individuals and partnerships that contributed to the project. At the same time, I recognize the lack of representation from two communities: the native Pacific Islander community and the transgendered community. I call for more discussion and planning in future community projects as well as for renaming the exhibit *Leaving Silence: Queer Asian American Oral History Exhibit*. The chapter ends by defining the exhibit as a political entity.

²⁴ Maya Lin, *Boundaries* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 2:03.

I also point out that my investment in queer Asian communities comes from my own identity as an Asian lesbian.

Chapter 2, "Literature Review," reviews the literature on queer Asian sexual identities and suggests an interdisciplinary approach to this issue. Looking at Asian American movements, feminists and gay liberation within a North American context, I show how various activists discuss gender identities, sexuality, and class divisions. Drawing from poetry, prose, novels, and essays in queer Asian anthologies and feminist writings, I present a complex view of same-sex desire and its social and political consequences. In discussing feminist research methodologies, I show how social activism can be integrated within academic traditions. Using Carmen Luke's public pedagogical framework, I demonstrate *Leaving Silence's* potential for contributing to progressive education within non-traditional sites.

Chapter 3, "Methods and Procedures," offers a thorough investigation of my role as project coordinator/a researcher as well as a step-by-step description of the process involved in putting the exhibit together. It is my hope that this detailed description will be of benefit to other community activists who may wish to engage in similar research and visibility campaigns.

Chapter 4, "Differences with Queer Asian Identity: Narratives and Images of Identity-making," discusses the exhibit's four recurring themes: (1) generational differences with regard to the use of the word "queer," (2) the relationship between achievement and family acceptance, (3) being in-between, and (4) religion. In attempting to address why these particular topics continually resurfaced in the interviews, I provide quotes from the transcripts as well as from related literature. I discuss how the contents of the narratives, the black-and-white photographs, and the public nature of the exhibit combined to result in an automatic "outing" of the narrators and a concomitant concern for their safety. I also point out that, rather than seeing the thirteen

narratives and thirty-four photographs as being definitive of queer Asian lives, they should be seen as snapshots and sound bites. In other words, they offer the merest glimpse into a complex and silenced community.

Chapter 5, "The Pedagogy of a Travelling Exhibit," focuses primarily upon the issue of how public educational pedagogies that take place within non-traditional sites can raise political awareness of social issues. Feminist pedagogues rightly view themselves as attempting to facilitate dialogues around topics that are subject to controversy. *Leaving Silence* fits into this mould, for it functions to provide public audiences with information on what being queer and Asian means to different people. The exhibit has the potential to assist any viewer interested in understanding queer Asian lives. In creating a link between a visibility campaign and an educational moment, *Leaving Silence* displays the potential to aid in social transformation. It also shows the multiple intersections of racism, sexism, homophobia, and classism, thus offering the potential to engage in a more in-depth analysis of the place of such exhibits within educational research. In addition, I contend that *Leaving Silence* functions as a form of travelling pedagogy - a pedagogy that challenges fixed sites (for learning) and stable meanings.

In contemplating future research options, I would suggest looking at the boundaries crossed by queer Asians and Pacific Islanders in the process of coming out. During the coordination and the writing of this project, I came to realize how coming out differs within different geographical and social contexts. For example, to Asian Americans the notion of "coming out" means something different, depending on whether they are immigrants, refugees, or first generation Asian Americans. Family ties and histories often play various roles in whether or not one decides to be out as a queer person. How does this affect the ability to come out? While the language of governmental census rigidly categorize

racial identities, the coming out experiences of Asians and Pacific Islanders are as diverse as are the cultures themselves. How does coming out translate into diversified social and cultural contexts? What does it mean when a queer person comes out by crossing national borders (e.g., by emigrating from a predominantly Asian country to a North American country)?

Another area of research would entail exploring how we can include queer perspectives in high school curricula. I had the chance to interview Tino Umali, a gay youth activist, for the *Leaving Silence* project. I met Tino once again, when he was sixteen, and his narrative appeared on the exhibit panel. Four and a half years later, I returned to Seattle, Washington, for a queer Asian and Pacific Islander conference (Lotus Roots 4). At the age of twenty, he remains in the forefront of queer youth activism. Tino's presence at the conference held deep meaning for me. It demonstrated the importance of supporting queer youth in their activist work by providing them with an inclusive high school curriculum. In his interview, Tino acknowledged the peer support that he received from his classmates, but he also vocalized the lack of support from school administration. I have no doubt that the official inclusion of queer perspectives in high school curricula would enable students, parents, teachers, administrators, school counselors, and principals to be more aware of queer youth issues. Although I applaud the establishment of gay-straight alliances in some US high schools, I cannot over-emphasize the need for queer inclusive issues to form part of classroom discussions, textbooks, and library materials. One might begin to approach such issues through a discussion of gender identity.

I hope that, by posing these and similar topics as future research options, pedagogy can begin to take queerness (and its many implications) far more seriously than it does at the moment. I believe in the potential of social change through education. I perceive public

education to be a channel through which to address social and political issues concerning how knowledge is produced and how sexual identities are constructed. In identifying with the tenets of feminist education, I also see the meaningful role that educators can play in facilitating dialogues -- dialogues that contribute to an increased public understanding of what might seem to be controversial and highly contested subjects. A progressive educator can challenge the normativity of educational practices and address unpopular issues within various learning spaces. As Luke suggests, learning and teaching can take place in rare moments and within unusual sites. In discussing and debating contentious political and social issues, a responsible educator can engage passionately with her students. Education, in other words, has the capacity (and, hence, educators have the responsibility) to inform public opinion and to shape public consciousness.

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APPENDIX A

Queer Asian & API Oral History Exhibition Seattle, Washington

Agreement for Volunteer Interviewer

The goal of the project is to promote the visibility and understanding of gays, lesbians and bisexuals within the Asian and Pacific Islander communities. A travelling exhibit composed of interviews and photographs of API gays, lesbians and bisexuals and their family members will help to bring a personal glimpse into the lives of these community members. The exhibit will be unveiled on National Coming Out Month, October 1996 and will travel throughout the region at high schools, universities, community centers, museums and galleries.

Upon signing this form, I agree to the following conditions set forth by the Project Coordinator.

- Public use of my name in affiliation with the Exhibit in order to meet its goal to promote the visibility and understanding of gays, lesbians and bisexuals within the API communities.
- Adhere to all notions of confidentiality including: disclosed information in interviews and modes of communication (phone conversations and notes), and an individual's sexual orientation or health status known through my involvement with the Exhibit unless permission is given by the individual.
- All tapes, written notes and transcripts should be returned to the Project Coordinator as soon as possible. The Advisory Committee shall determine the ownership of these written documents.
- Any complaints resulting from my interview(s) with interview subject(s) would be notified by the Project Coordinator for my knowledge. The Project Coordinator will meet with both parties regarding the allegation(s) but she will not assume responsibility for seeking solutions unless it is deemed destructive to the Exhibit itself.
- Any complaints from me would be taken seriously by the Project Coordinator with utmost confidentiality unless personal permission is given for public knowledge. For complaints in regards to the Project Coordinator herself, I should have access to Advisory Committee members and hence seek their advice for appropriate action(s).
- Be available for clarifications of written transcripts or the interviewing process.
- If my interview is selected for the Exhibit, I shall have the written transcript typed up and handed in to the Project Coordinator within 14 days or less.
- Be respectful at all times to the interviewee(s)/interview subject(s).
- I shall seriously consider any kind of relationship beyond the professional relationship between an interviewer and an interviewee/interview subject. The Project Coordinator is not responsible for any personal conflicts resulting from both parties' voluntary participation in the Exhibit.

Signature _____

Date _____

Name in Print _____

APPENDIX B

List of Working Advisory Committee Members and an edited version of Committee
Biographies submitted by members themselves

Max Chan

Max is still in search of the ultimate gastronomical orgasm to her catering company, Foreign Affairs.

Judith A. Chen

Judy Chen seeks to create community capacity for social change through education, leadership development and building on our strengths. She co-founded an API domestic violence community organizing agency and an API lesbian/gay/bisexual anti-homophobia project.

Anne Xuân Clark

Anne Xuân Clark is a Vietnamese Irish lesbian film and video artist working in Seattle's International District. By day, she is the Campaign Manager for the International District Village Square. In her spare time, she co-founded Seattle's Asian Lesbian and Bisexual Alliance.

Vinh Do

My interests lie in conflicts and communication. I'd like to study how these two things interact within cultures and how they play out inter-culturally. My work has been in journalism, in social work, and in activism.

Thomas Gamble

Thom has lived in the Puget Sound region since he was a child and has worked to promote community development/activism for the last 8 years. Always evolving, changing and moving through identities; he has found strength and community working against the scourge of HIV/AIDS through the development of a vibrant queer Asian community.

Ron Ho

Ron Ho has spent over 34 years as an art educator, 32 of these with the Bellevue Public Schools. He was given awards as the "Elementary Art Educator of the Year" by the Washington Art Education Association and the "Pacific Regional Elementary Art Educator of the Year" by the National Art Education Association. He is also a recognized jewelry artist who has exhibited nationally, in Europe and the Northwest.

Soya Jung

In the Northwest, Soya spent a couple of long years at the International Examiner, and worked as a propagandist for the Democrats in Olympia. For now, she is the coordinator of the Washington Alliance for Immigrant and Refugee Justice.

Bob Shimabukuro

Robert Shimabukuro is currently executive director of APAC. Of Leaving Silence, he says, "It was the right time for someone to do a project like this. Better us than anybody else. So we did it."

Janet SooHoo

Janet is a community organizer and political activist in spirit and action, an artist shoulda been, and the Deputy Director of Asian Counseling and Referral Service in reality.

Alice Wu

Although the bulk of Ms. Wu's twenties have been spent creating multimedia music publications for the Internet, she finds solace in her volunteer activities with groups such as ALBA, of which she is a co-founder.

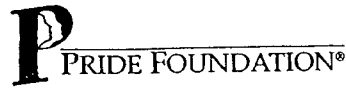
List of Honorary Advisory Committee Members

Aldo Chan	Ron Chew	Eric Ishino	Vivian Luna
Ia Rodriguez	Bob Santos	Joby Shimomura	Frieda Takemura
Norma Timbang	The Honorable Martha Choe, Seattle City Council.		
The Honorable Velma Veloria, WA State Representative.			

APPENDIX C

Funders:

Pride Foundation
City of Seattle, Department of Neighborhoods.



Individual Donors (to date):

John Blatchford
Genevieve Buckley
Aldo Chan
Judy Chen & Leslie Komori
Dao-Liang Chou
Anne Xuân Clark
Vinh Do
Eric Ishino
Michelle Kumata
Kelvin Lee
Serena Louie
Rhena Miller
Ruth Miska
Michael Olson
Phi T. Pham & Von D. Brady
Hoang Huy Phan & Stephen H. Blodgett
Melissa S. K. Ponder
Ia Rodriguez
Erika A. Schwarzwald
Bob Shimabukuro
Janet SooHoo
Kayleen Stration
Frieda Takemura
Paul Tamura & Dennis Tran
Greg Tuai
Alexandra Tuai
Venus Velazquez
Alison M. Warp
Benling Wong
Dorothy Wong
Alice Wu

Community Sponsorships & "In-Kind" Services

Asian Counseling and Referral Service
Asian Lesbian and Bisexual Alliance
Asian Pacific AIDS Council

Asian Pacific Islander Homosexuality/
Homophobia Education Project
Committee To Elect Cal Anderson
Foreign Affairs Catering & Four Seas Restaurant
Inay's Kitchen Inc.
International Community Health Services
The International Examiner
KeeperKard
Lesbian & Gay Heritage Alliance
The Lesbian Resource Center
Merchants Parking/Transia
Microsoft
Northwest Asian American Theatre
Northwest Nikkei
Queer & Asian
Red & Black Books
Royal Glass Company
The Wing Luke Asian Museum
Washington Education Association
Washington Federation of State Employees, AFL-
CIO, Local 443

Community Endorsements:

Asian Pacific Task Force - Church Council of
Greater Seattle
Bailey - Boushay House
Gay City Health Project
Lambert House
Northwest AIDS Foundation
Northwest Lesbian & Gay History Museum Project
Pacific Islander and Asian Young Women's
Resource Gathering
People of Color Against AIDS Network
Seattle Chinatown/International District
Preservation and Development Authority
Washington Alliance for Immigrant and Refugee
Justice

For touring requests, please contact Jim Rosengrun at the Exhibit Touring
Services, Eastern Washington University, 1-800-356-1256 or (509)359-4331.

APPENDIX D

*Queer Asian & Pacific Islander
Oral History Exhibition
Seattle, Washington*

Transcript Index Form

Date: _____ Place: _____ Length: _____

Personal Data

Interview Subject

Name: _____

Address: _____

Interviewer

Name: _____

Address: _____

Length of Acquaintance with the Interview Subject: _____

Interview Data

Key Words: _____

Abstract of Interview: _____

Additional Comments: _____

For use by the Project Coordinator only

☐ Selected

Date: _____

☐ Rejected

Date: _____

Reason(s) for rejection: _____

APPENDIX E

Queer Asian & Pacific Islander Oral History Exhibition Seattle, Washington

Interview Questions

1. When and where were you born? Where were you raised?
2. How would you describe your ethnicity? Which generation of immigrant do you belong to?
3. How would you describe your sexual identity? Did you marry? Do you have any children?
4. When and how did you come out? Did you come out to the "larger" gay community or Asian communities? What made you decide to come out in the community you chose?
5. How did your (biological/chosen) family members react to your coming out?
6. Where are your (biological/chosen) family members now? Will they be available for photographs?
7. Does language create any barriers for your (biological/chosen) family members to understand your sexual identity?
8. Do you feel any cultural barriers in coming out to yourself and your (biological/chosen) family members? Did your (biological/chosen) parents stress any cultural values?
9. How do you think Asian communities are reacting to homosexuality? Does your family react in similar ways? Where do you usually find emotional support?
10. What is your occupation? Have you participated in any community or political organizations?
11. Describe what being queer and Asian means to you.
12. What is your relationship to the "larger" gay communities?
13. Did you experience unfair treatment in Asian communities or the larger gay communities for being queer and Asian?
14. How do your family members react to your visibility as a queer Asian?
15. Do you think the queer Asian community in Seattle reflect diversity (in terms of class, ethnicity, age, physical ability, age, sexual identity, language, generations of immigrant)?
16. How has the queer Asian community changed from your earliest memories until today?
17. What do you foresee in the future for stronger queer Asian solidarity?
18. What are some of the issues not addressed by Asian communities and the "larger" gay communities?

APPENDIX F

*Queer Asian & API
Oral History Exhibition
Seattle, Washington*

Consent Form for Interview Subject/Narrator

I hereby grant, to the Queer Asian Oral History Exhibition of Seattle, Washington, permission to use the contents of our interviews, whether tape recorded or otherwise, for such scholarly and educational purposes as the Advisory Committee of the Exhibition shall determine, including literary publication.

I also grant permission for the purposes of the Exhibition to reproduce and use any photographs taken or donated to the Exhibit.

It is to my understanding that the Project Coordinator may have to exclude my interview from the Queer Asian Oral History Exhibition in order to have a diverse representation of queer Asians' experiences. I shall be notified of this decision as soon as the Project Coordinator, in consultation with Advisory Committee members, allowed such an exclusion. The Project Coordinator is responsible for editing the interview to fit the criterias of the Exhibit. The final text will be made available for feedback on my part and the Project Coordinator will work collaboratively with me on the final text if disagreements occur.

During the travelling period of the Exhibition, the tape recordings, notes, photographs created or preserved by this Exhibition may be used or displayed in public locations (such as in galleries, coffee shops, libraries, community centers or museums), which would take temporary possession of these materials and make them available for use by researchers and members of the public.

This agreement is subject to any special conditions listed below.

Special conditions:

Subject of Tape(s): _____

Name of interview subject/narrator: _____

Address of interviewee: _____

Name of interviewer: _____

Address of interviewer: _____

Signature of interview subject/narrator: _____

Signature of interviewer (witness): _____

Date of agreement: _____

The Queer Asian Oral History Exhibit is made possible through generous contributions from Pride Foundation, City of Seattle(Department of Neighborhoods), Asian Lesbian & Bisexual Alliance, Queer 'n' Asian, Asian Pacific Islander Homosexuality/Homophobia Education Project, Asian Pacific AIDS Council and individual donations.

APPENDIX G

Leaving Silence:
Queer Asian/Pacific Islander Oral History Exhibit
Seattle, Washington
October, 1996

Please mark your volunteer position for the Exhibit.

- ☐ Advisory Committee Member ☐ Interviewer
☐ Interview Subject/Narrator ☐ Other, please specify: _____

Period of involvement: _____

Number of hours contributed (estimation): _____

Please outline your volunteer activities for this Exhibit:

How did you know about the project?

- ☐ Queer&Asian ☐ Asian Lesbian & Bisexual Alliance ☐ Asian Pacific AIDS Council
☐ Asian Pacific Islander Homosexuality/Homophobia Education Project
☐ Media, please specify: _____
☐ Friends

How did you get involved in this project?

Why did you get involved in this project?

Do you have any comments on the structure, coordination or objectives of the Exhibit?

What kind of queer Asian/Pacific Islander projects would you like to see in the near future?

Would you be interested in helping us organize future events? _____

(Please feel free to use the next page for further comments.)

(Optional): Name: _____ Contact Number: _____

Thank you very much for your feedback.

APPENDIX H

Register Listing
10/29/96 Through 10/29/96

Date	Num	Transaction	Decrease	✓	Increase	Balance
10/29/96		Opening Balance		✓	0.00	0.00
10/29/96		Pride Foundation			6,600.00	6,600.00
10/29/96		City of Seattle, Dept. of Neigh.			5,000.00	11,600.00
10/29/96		Queer&Asian			250.00	11,850.00
10/29/96		Asian Lesbian & Bisexual Alliance			150.00	12,000.00
10/29/96		APIHHEP			200.00	12,200.00
10/29/96		Donations (Cash & Cheques)			3,750.00	15,950.00
10/29/96		APAC Rent	600.00			15,350.00
10/29/96		Project Coordinator	8,662.00			6,688.00
10/29/96		Photographer	1,000.00			5,688.00
10/29/96		Graphic Designer	1,000.00			4,688.00
10/29/96		Office Supplies	128.82			4,559.18
10/29/96		Postage	292.16			4,267.02
10/29/96		U.S. Immigration (Work Permit)	56.00			4,211.02
10/29/96		Publicity: Printing	1,246.28			2,964.74
10/29/96		Raw Materials for Construction	858.34			2,106.40
10/29/96		Photocopying of Exhibit Materials	152.00			1,954.40
10/29/96		Portraits: Printing & Mounting	1,130.14			824.26
10/29/96		Opening Reception	347.96			476.30

The above budget does not include postage to national queer Asian/Pacific Islander organizations and other organizations interested in the Exhibit. Approximately \$150 will be spent on sending the promotional booklet to over 200 organizations.

Here is something to celebrate:

176 persons signed in at the Opening Reception with some of them from Anchorage, Vancouver B.C., Portland, San Francisco, Los Angeles and New York. Just to let you know, not everyone signed in at the front table. Imagine.....

Fundraising efforts by Advisory Committee members and individuals from the International District communities came to a total of \$3,500. Funds were used in many different ways:

The number of panels increased from four to twelve.

Framing of the Exhibit was made possible.

More photographs were printed for each interview subject.

A promotional booklet was launched at the Opening Reception.

Media Coverage (to date): Beacon Hill News, Downtown Source, The International Examiner, Kiro News (Special Program), Northwest Asian Weekly, Northwest Nikkei, Seattle Gay News, Southend District Journal, Ultra Violet (Lesbian Resource Center Publication).

For all touring requests and extra promotional booklets (available January 1, 1997), please contact:

Jim Rosengren

Exhibit Touring Services, Eastern Washington University, College of Letters, Arts and Social Sciences

Mail Stop 159, 526 5th St., Cheney, Washington 99004-2431.

Phone numbers: 1-800-356-1256 or (509) 359-4331.

APPENDIX I



Bookda Gheisar

Bookda Gheisar

Born 1962, Tehran, Iran.

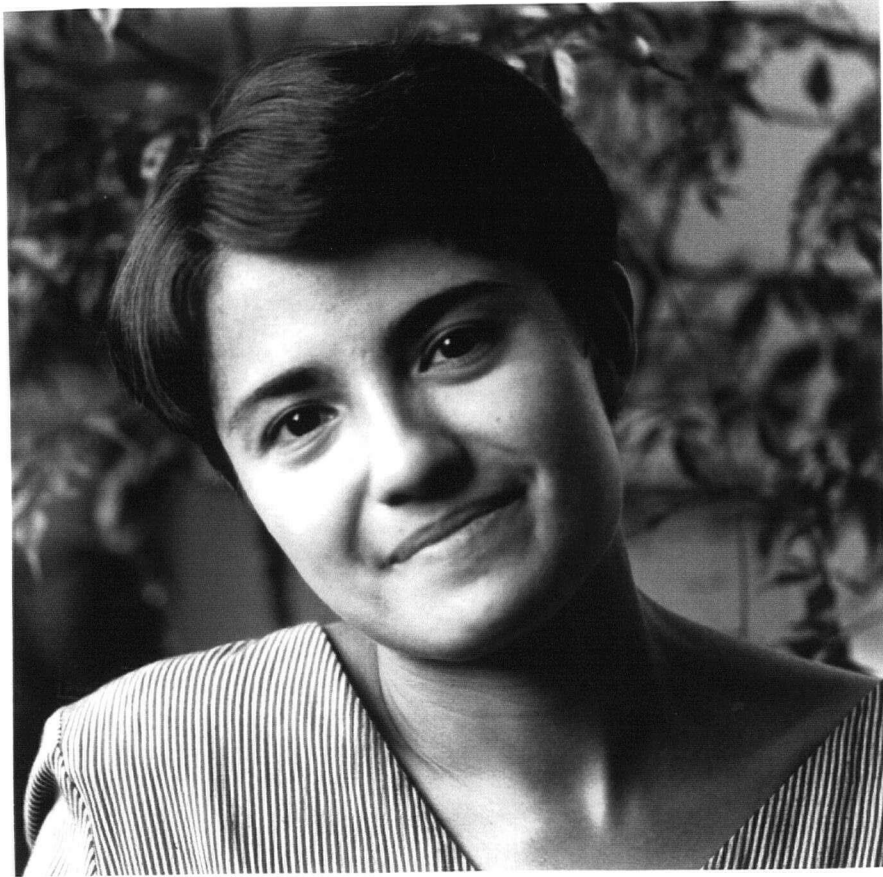
Iranian/Executive Director of the Cross Cultural Health Care Program

I never heard the word "lesbian" growing up and was not at all aware that "lesbian" had an equivalent in Farsi.

When I was coming out and explaining that I am involved with women, my mom said, "I don't understand what you're trying to say to me. I'm also involved with women!" I think that has a lot to do with women's relationships in Iran and a lot of other countries outside of the United States.

As I was growing up, I would go all the time to women-only parties with my mother. My mom had a lot of very close women friends. I tried to explain further to my mother, "I'm really interested in women, and being a part of women's community." And she said, "I know what you mean, that's the way we all are." So I had to add, "But you're going to have to really understand this, I have sex with women. I do something that you don't do with your woman friends."

And the of course, I found out that women often do that too, in Iran, but in hiding and not in the open.



Perveen Ali

Perveen Ali

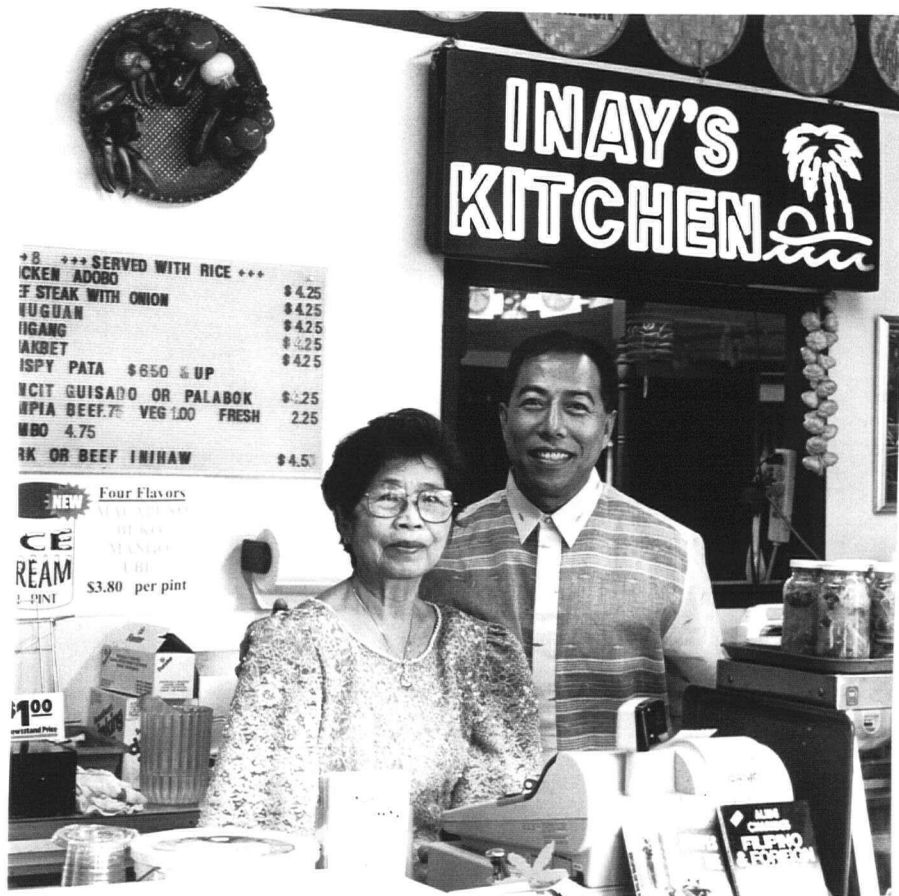
Born 1973, Denver, Colorado, United States.

Bangladeshi & American/Anti-Oppression/Liberation Worker

It was always in my consciousness although I didn't have a language to talk about it. I heard the words gay and lesbian but I've never heard bisexual. There're all these things about my life that is a kind of life living in between cultures. I mean I'm bi-racial, I'm bisexual. To me, coming out was not so much revealing my sexual identity to my friends, which most of them already know, but it was coming out as a political person.

There is a certain amount of invisibility that I experienced primarily because "Asian" is such a broad category. Most Asian groups that call themselves Asian are Southeast Asians, and they know little about South Asia. They also don't talk about issues around what it is to be queer and Asian. For instance, some Asian groups I work with, they do a lot of work supporting Asian kids in schools but they never talk about what it is to be a gay Asian kid in junior high or they don't talk about the Asian kid's experiencing homophobia at school.

I've noticed in the queer Asian community an incredible focus on what it means to be Asian-American. So first-generation immigrants are frequently left out and their issues are left out. It is understandable because you have to choose your projects and what you're gonna work on, but I think if we want more solidarity, we have to address queer Asian issues in an international context.



Ernesto Rios and Leonilla Rios Bobadilla (mother)

Ernesto Rios

Born 1948, General Trias, Cavite, The Philippines.

Filipino/Business Entrepreneur

I didn't tell my family. They just knew when I was growing up. In my small town in Cavite, if there are gay children in the family, they think you are jinx, bad luck. But my family didn't believe that, they still love me, and I said, "Hey, I'm not going to be bad luck. I'm the one who brings the good luck in the family." You know what, I grew up with a big family. Even though my mom and dad had jobs, it's not enough to support eleven kids, so we grew up being poor. I was not embarrassed to go out on the streets and sell anything. I sold candies, I sold bread, I sold bananas, I sold peanuts, anything.

Once in a while, I get depressed over a person or over the business, but it doesn't last. I learnt how to cope with my life. A new day always bring me a fresh start, you know, and I thank the Lord every morning.



Eric Ishino
Born 1954, Seattle, Washington, United States.
Japanese/Administrative Services Manager, Seattle City Council.

I think because we live in a predominantly white society and Asians and Pacific Islanders are not portrayed extensively in the media nor represented in great numbers in gay and lesbian organizations, there is not a realization of how diverse the gay and lesbian community really is – that we really do come in all colors.

Being a partner to an elected official (State Senator Cal Anderson) was quite rewarding and also frustrating with the hectic schedule and loss of privacy. In addition, it was challenging to have a sense of my own identity. I think some people thought all I was the dutiful partner, kind of like the dressing on the side and may not have realized the extent that I participated in his political career. Throughout his eight years in office I was his campaign treasurer and jack-of-all trades campaign worker, helped write and edit his speeches and newsletters and acted as an advisor on many issues.

In my 10 1/2 year relationship with Cal, we tried to live life to its fullest in work and in play. I knew that he was HIV positive from the very beginning. Sure, it was in the back of the mind that someday he might get sick but had I decided to end the relationship, I would not have had the joy of those incredible years with Cal. I really felt that I started living when I met him. So, when he died in 1995, a part of me died. But, the wonderful memories, all that I learned from Cal and the personal growth I experienced during our years together, have given me the strength to carry on – and to love again.



Left to Right: Buster, Ron Ho and Ray Ho (brother).

Ron Ho

Born 1936, Honolulu, Hawaii, United States.

Chinese/ Jewelry Artist

I guess, probably from the time I was 15, I always knew that I was attracted to men. My mother died of cancer about 10 years ago. I was home in Hawaii and we started talking about me being a gay Asian man. It took so long to actually tell them because it was not something that was easy to talk about as far as being Chinese. Those things aren't discussed generally in the Chinese family.

My Dad was close to his eighties at that time. He said he loved me no matter what and that was fine. My sister and I were always very close. She was there through the last days when my mother was dying. She asked my mother if she knew that I was gay and my mother said that she knew. Mothers know those sorts of things. My brother loves me. Ray is as fine a brother as one could ever have. He's a very wonderful, open, generous person who is always willing to give me a hand whenever I need a hand. He also is a good listener. Whenever I've had problems in my relationships I've talked to my brother.

I was also in a profession where those things weren't actually talked about either. Now I'm retired as teacher and I do art workshops on occasion in schools. I taught for 34 years, 32 of those with the Bellevue School District.



S.E.L. asked Tracy Tsutsumoto (staff graphic designer) to draw a sun to represent her image for the exhibit.

S.E.L.

Born 1960, Seattle, Washington, United States.

Chinese/Transgendered Male-to-Female/Entrepreneur

Personally, I don't know of any transgendered Asians. There are two reasons for that, I don't circulate around very much. I mean I do get around but maybe not in similar areas or circles as other transgendered Asians. The second reason is my individual issue of not coming out as a transgendered person. I get emotional support from being myself and also from my friends. I have been to different support groups for four to five years. I just could not relate. A lot of the people in the support groups have personal problems, such as their lives being screwed up. So are you trying to tell me that I am going nowhere with my life as a transgendered person? To me, I have a very functional life. I am not looking for an escape by becoming a male-to-female transgendered person.

I am 36 years old. I am Chinese and I was born in Seattle. I began the process of becoming female in January 1993. I had experience doing the part-time thing, a part-time woman. Finally, I said to myself, "I am going to give myself a chance to be myself." The process will be completely finished by March, 1997.

My family knows. My mother is still in major denial. She said that it was her worst nightmare and this was like a spear in her heart, and now she has nothing to rest in peace. At first I thought it was my fault. Then in a day or two, I realized that she is no different than any Chinese mother. That is mom. This is the only way she knows how to react as traumatic as she is.



Tino Umali

Tino Umali

Born 1979, Seattle, Washington, United States.

Thai, Chinese, East Indian, Filipino, Spanish/queer youth activist/student/Calvin Klein fragrance model

For my junior year in Garfield High School, I made the cheer squad as a yell leader. By October, the school told me that I was not supposed to dance because I was a yell leader, not a cheer leader. I should just call out the cheers and do the arm movements, but no swinging of the hips or anything.

My mom went to the principal's office and said, "You're just discriminating against my son because he's gay." The principal said, "This is not the issue. We didn't make these rules up. It's the Washington Interscholastic Athletic Association." My mom just went, "Yes, it is an issue. It's discrimination."

So we called WIAA up and they told us that there are no guidelines saying what a yell leader does or what a cheer leader does. Then the school found out that they were wrong and we could sue them. They dropped it but they changed the paperwork for next year, adding a tiny sentence saying, "The yell leaders will not perform the dance routine."



Left to Right: Tanith Songsook Kimsing, Suzanne Kimsing (sister) and Chong Cha Gluesing (mother).

Tanith Songsook Kimsing

Born 1969, Seoul, Korea.

Korean, German & Swede/Lesbian/Supporter of Vaginal Pride/Bearer of Interesting Times/Non-Vindictive

I came out when I was 23. I came out to my mom after my break-up with my first girlfriend. I didn't care what anybody thought, I was just so heartbroken so all she could say over and over was "Oh my goodness." She was like "Oh I always knew 50 percent and then I saw you with her, 75 percent, and now it is 100 percent." My sister, was the first one to know. She is 100 percent supportive.

I think I might want to go to Korea, teach English and learn about the Korean culture. My mom tells me to go ahead, grow out my hair and get rid of my piercings. Then I'll have a lot more respect. I know it'll be hard in Korea, for one thing I am mixed, and another thing I am Western. My mom told me times have changed. But I don't know really. We'll see what happens.

My spirit is the survivor.



Left to Right: Katayoun Issari, Val Kanuha, Ann Lee, Hanson Lee and Nan Stoops.

Val Kanuha

Born 1951, Hilo, Hawaii.

Hawaiian-Chinese, and Japanese/Community Activist/Social Worker

I know I was very influenced – probably in many ways without knowing it as a young girl - by my mother's assertiveness, her competence as a public health nurse, and her dedication to my brothers, sister and me as a mother. I always thought of her as a role model for what and how I wanted to be when I grew up. My mother kept her maiden name as her middle name, so she always went by "Chitose Araki Kanuha." It wasn't until I grew up that I realized how unusual that was: To have a Japanese American mother of the 50's who used her maiden name as part of her work name.

Often when I was growing up people would call me a "tomboy". I think it was a combination of how I looked and what I did. When I was in elementary school, all the boys liked me cause I could play sports just as well as the boys did. And, I was kind of a leader that could organize kids into teams which is usually thought of as a "boy thing". I sometimes felt embarrassed about being called a tomboy because I thought it meant that I was being more like a boy and I knew I wasn't really a boy. On the other hand, I was angry because I also felt that people – usually adults – were saying that it was a bad thing for a girl to act like a boy: to be athletic, strong, confident and yet in a strange way, to be liked by boys for only those reasons and not because I was a girl.

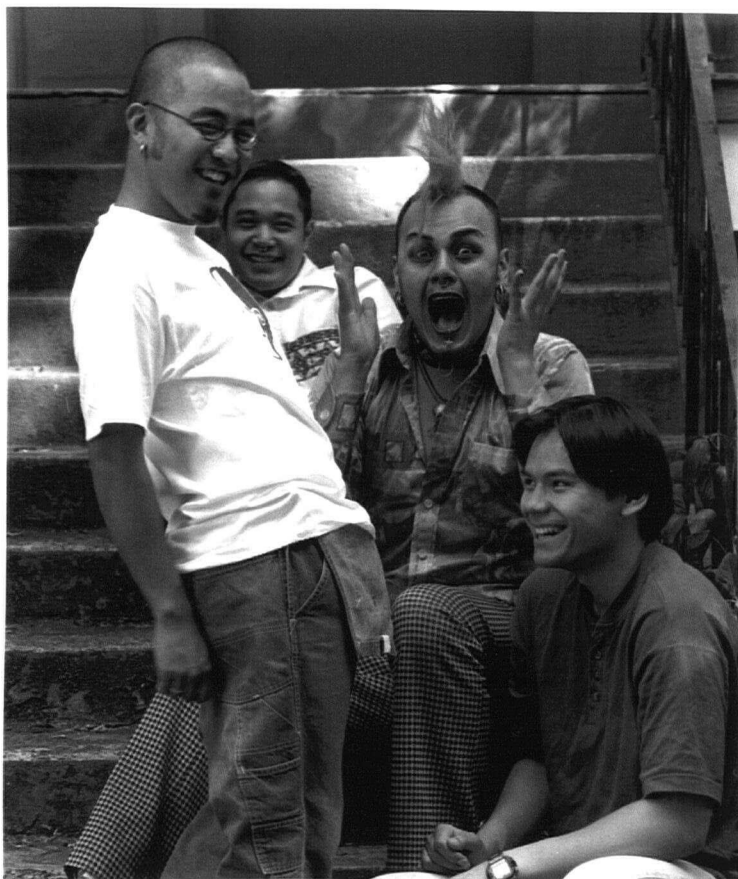


Karen Maeda Allman

Karen Maeda Allman
Born 1958, Wichita, Kansas, United States.
Bookseller/PhD. Candidate in Nursing

Let's see, I was a part of a group that called Asian Lesbian Network in 1989. I think we're called something like that. Some of these women are still around. The group was formed right after one of the National Asian lesbian gatherings in California, and we used to meet at the Lesbian Resource Center. Most women were of my age. There was a real pull between should we be doing activism or should we be doing a support group, as well as discussion on the purpose of the group. For me, it was very liberating at that time to even see other Asian lesbians because that was my only and my first opportunity to meet other Asian lesbians.

Now in the Asian lesbian and bisexual community, there're the early twenty year olds, and then some of us in late thirties, forties, and I think there are more queer Asian couples. There's more in-your-face activism and a lot more people queer Asians in the Pride Parade. There used to be only 4 or 5 of us with a banner. It's getting more exciting now.



Left to Right: Thom Gamble, Samuel Yao, Dave Drew and Henry Drew (brother).

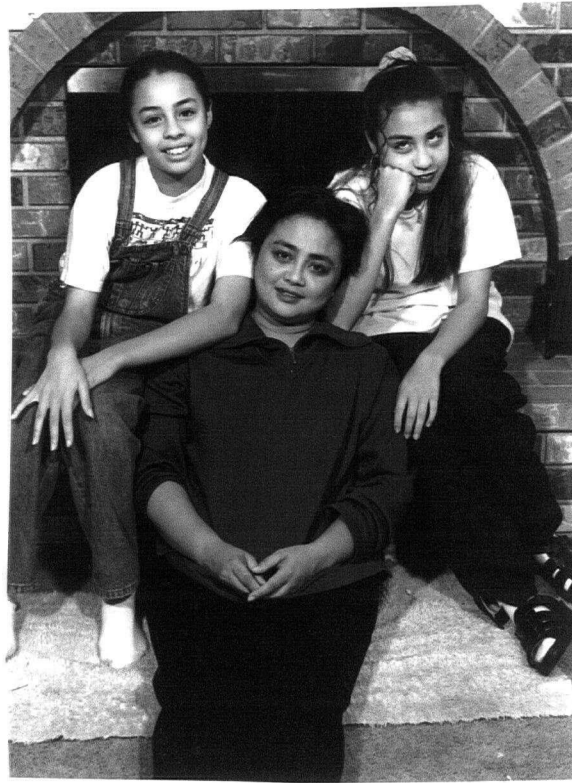
Dave Drew

Born 1971, Vung Tàu, Sài-gòn, Vietnam.

Vietnamese & German & English/Club Kid/Drag Queen/Performance
Artist/Singer/Spoken-word Artist/Painter/Multi-ethnic/Freak

It happened in Seattle on January 30th, 1991. I got on the bus with my friend because we were going to be a Queer Nation meeting. We sat in the back and these three guys came on the bus. They asked us if we were gay and I said yes. They were on acid and they had knives. They didn't like queers. Things happened and knives were flying here and there. Then they ran off the bus and we told the bus driver, "Yo, something just happened. Call the police." The police caught two of them in five minutes. There were so many people on that bus who heard the whole fucking thing. But no one did anything because they were too caught up in their own lives.

I've gone through this fag-bashing, and I've gone through so many different people trying to hurt me. Basically I found out that the only person who can really hurt me is myself, and hurting myself is not being who I am.



Left to Right: Natasha (daughter), Norma Timbang and Gabrielle (daughter).

Norma Timbang

Born 1956, Bremerton, Washington, United States.
Filipino/Bisexual mother of Natasha and Gabrielle.

I am out to my 11 year old and 13 year old daughters, Gabrielle and Natasha. I explain to them things like, hate crimes, physical and verbal bashing, especially bashing bisexuality and what it means to come out. Since they were young, both have accompanied me at holiday and other social and political gatherings with gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered friends. Their orientation to "more than just hetero" world has given them a perspective of diversity which I wish everyone of their peers had – one of open and genuine acceptance. They have both been very inquisitive about my bisexuality from time to time. They realize that instead of dating a man, I might be dating a woman. It's hard to bring up those issues. Many of their peers are homophobic. They're raised in a heterosexual world and I want to make sure that it doesn't hurt my daughters or nieces or whoever. I always envision my daughters' friends saying "Oh God, you're the one with the mother who likes women."

I believe very strongly in teaching children to stand up for what they believe in. Every person has the human right to live different lifestyles.



Shirley Yee

Shirley Yee

Born 1959, New York, New York, United States.

Chinese/Director of Women's Studies at the University of Washington.

Seattle/Associate Professor in U.S. Women's History

I've always known that I've been attracted to women. But I could never name it. It only occurred to me that I am a lesbian when I was in my late twenties. I had a very strong heterosexual identity and ties in my graduate student community then. I was living in Columbus and I didn't feel that comfortable coming out in that community. I also knew that I was coming to teach in Seattle. I figured that number one, Seattle has an Asian community that I needed, and second of all, that I could come out without any ties to the past. I could start life anew.

When I came to the University of Washington, I was the first woman of color and lesbian of color in the faculty of Women's Studies. So I had to be quite cautious of choosing my associates, quite careful of choosing friends.