

Understanding Otherness: Exploring Othering Experiences and
Self-Identification among Ethnic Minority Adolescents

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Abstract

The construct of Otherness has been briefly explored in the literature to date, but despite being proposed to fit ethnic minorities (Bhatia, 2007) the actual exploration of how Otherness may impact ethnic minorities has not been undertaken. This study serves to close this gap in the literature by specifically exploring the relations between Otherness, self-identification, and constructs of cultural navigation among ethnic minority adolescents. A mixed-methods approach was undertaken to explore these variables, with a case-based qualitative approach to understand how Otherness is apparent in the experiences of ethnic minority adolescents, and a quantitative approach to understand the relations between categories of Otherness, self-identification, and constructs of cultural navigation. Results indicate that experiences of Disruptive Otherness are related to the constructs of ethnic self-identification, and Heritage Culture Commitment, while self-identification is also related to Heritage Culture Commitment and American Culture Commitment.

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Understanding Otherness: Exploring Othering Experiences and
Self-Identification among Ethnic Minority Adolescents

Despite the multitude of social and political changes over the past century, being non-White in America still holds a great number of challenges. Mistry and Wu (2010) point out that even in the research literature, children classified as racial minorities¹ are labeled as different, or as having deficits, when compared to the supposed “norm” of the majority population. According to population projections by the United States Census Bureau, non-Hispanic Whites will cease to be the majority population in the U.S. by 2060 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). While no single racial group is anticipated to be a majority at that time, it still stands that over half the population will be comprised of groups which, if not considered “less than” are still frequently considered “different.” Despite this changing demographic, however, the social norms and treatment of minority groups are historically much more resistant to change, maintaining the status quo regarding social treatment and expectation until a necessary social shift seems beneficial for groups in power (Brodkin, 1998). The goal of the proposed study is to examine the experience of growing up being viewed as ‘different’ and the relation of this experience to youths’ affiliations with their multiple worlds, their perceptions of how their heritage groups are viewed, self-identification, and how they navigate their multiple worlds.

¹ The use of the terms “race,” “ethnicity,” and “culture” are often conflated in the literature. An explanation of the use of these terms within this paper is presented in the literature review, beginning on page 3.

Social interactions can have an immense influence on our social cognitions, particularly when these experiences are laden with messages regarding group membership. Recent research has shown that when children receive even brief messages about social groups, their perceptions of the group as a whole are impacted. A study by Kang and Inzlicht (2012) indicated that children between the ages of six and seven rely heavily on instruction to make judgments of an outgroup, even when that instruction contradicts their personal experiences; for example, children told members of a group were “mean” were likely to rate group interactions negatively, even if they actually had positive interactions. Children over the age of seven, however, relied on their personal experiences to influence their ratings, rather than what they were told. Thus, what a child experiences or is told may inform what the child believes about the motives of a particular group. But what happens when this experience includes the message that the child herself is different from the perceived cultural norm? How does that influence her perceptions of the world and culture around her, and where does she fit in?

Being identified as different is not necessarily a negative experience in and of itself. Bhatia (2007) describes three ways in which difference, or *Otherness*, may be felt. The first, Generic Otherness, is the internal voice which notifies the individual that he is different from a perceived collective norm; depending on the individual’s beliefs, this could be something neutral, or even something to be celebrated. The second, Marked Otherness, is comprised of specific traits that signify a difference, such as physical appearance, accent, or

specific cultural mannerisms; whether this is positive or negative could depend on the reactions of others to these differences. Finally, Disruptive Otherness is the feeling of being marginalized or alienated through the experience of racism, discrimination, or bias, all things generally considered negative experiences. While Bhatia describes these constructions of difference as being related specifically to the Indian diaspora in the United States, I argue that it is possible to view them as being normative to anyone who has cause to identify as different.

But how does being different impact an individual? Mistry and Wu (2010) note that the psychological experience of being ‘different’ may be a mediating process in ethnic minority children’s development, specifically with regard to how children learn to navigate between multiple cultural worlds. The salience of the experience, the affective or emotional dimensions that impact the child, and perceptions of distance and conflict between the child’s cultural heritage and the American mainstream culture are all part of meaning-making processes undertaken by a child to inform his or her world view and develop the skills necessary to navigate and negotiate contexts.

The purpose of this study is to examine the lived experiences of adolescents who identify as being different from the perceived cultural norm, beginning with understanding how they came to see themselves as different and whether the origin can be framed or conceptualized using Bhatia’s (2007) constructions of difference. From this understanding, I will attempt to identify whether there is a relation between how participants came to see themselves as

different, their experiences of being ‘othered,’ and how they self-identify. I will also explore the relations between participants’ described experiences and their ratings of cultural commitment and affiliation, perceptions of discrimination, and perceptions of public regard.

Review of the Literature

Before delving into the literature review that provides the rationale for the present study, it is important to first define the terms race, ethnicity, and culture, as this will clarify how these three terms are being considered as they are also central to the arguments at hand.

From a historical perspective, the concept of “race” has been used as a tool of political power. Brodtkin (1998) notes that the initial practice of race-making came from European practices of religious superiority, the upholding of one religion as superior in order to hold practitioners of “lower” religions as inferior subordinates, and in some cases deny groups the rights to property or wealth. These practices were transformed through centuries to help support the concept of race as a more visibly identifiable label, one which supported claim of not only rights to property ownership, but also the concept of human ownership in the form of slavery. Harris (1993) corroborates this by detailing the history of Whiteness as property – that is, the right to ownership of both property and self, based on the color of one’s skin, facial features, or other visible, definable characteristics – and the subsequent legal processes within American government to continually redefine the meaning of being White in order to make clear and simple

boundaries.² As a result of these historical practices, today the term “race” typically indicates a social address for the visible markers used to group people into simple categories, and this is the intended definition of the use of race within this paper.

In contrast, the term “culture” is defined within this study as communities of practice (Rogoff, 2003). These practices often involve the meaning and values behind common life practices such as holiday observation and celebrations, religious instruction and worship, and expectations surrounding education, dating, family, and similar day-to-day encounters. In addition, this definition also encapsulates Yosso’s (2005) description of culture being a form of capital of strength and nurturance within communities.

However, both race and culture may often be conflated with ethnicity. This seems understandable given that reference dictionaries in the social sciences refer to ethnicity as, “a shared racial, linguistic or national identity of a social group” (Ethnicity, 2006; see also Ethnicity, 2000, and Ethnicity, 2004). Indeed, race and ethnicity are often tied so as to refer to groups as “ethnoracial,” in deference to the convolution of race as a visible identifier and ethnicity indicating cultural heritage, rather than biological (Brodkin, 1998). For the purposes of this study, “ethnicity” is used to refer to a combination of national identification and the cultural practices of others perceived to share that national identification,

² The explanation given here for the meaning and history of the term race, as well as the historical treatment of racial groups, is grossly oversimplified. However, it is beyond the scope of this paper to provide a full and detailed description of the history of the term and determination of “race.” For more detailed historical accounts, please see Brodtkin (1998) and Harris (1993).

regardless of racial label. When applicable, the term “national heritage” is used instead.

Despite the varying definitions of race, ethnicity, and culture in the literature, there is still a plethora of evidence regarding how these constructs affect development. The present study continues this exploration by considering what views are imposed upon children and adolescents, and how these impositions may affect the development of ethnic minority individuals.

The Social Context of Being an Ethnic Minority

The belief that all children develop in their own, individual ways, deeply impacted by their physical and social contexts is hardly a groundbreaking idea. However, despite growing understanding of differential developmental trajectories and their antecedents, in many ways we continue to focus on the growth and experience of the ethnic and cultural majority, viewing ethnic minority groups as being outside the norm and, in some cases, lesser than (Mistry & Wu, 2010). Recent research focusing on the adolescent experience of being an ethnic minority seeks to understand the various ways teens navigate themselves through differing cultural contexts (e.g. Mistry & Wu, 2010; Pufall-Jones, 2012), how they relate themselves to the ethnic majority and minority cultures (Miramontez, Benet-Martinez, & Nguyen, 2008), and their self-identification (Kiang & Luu, 2013; Nishina, Bellmore, Witkow, & Nylund-Gibson, 2010). However, to date there has been little research on the experiences that launch ethnic minority children’s perception that they are somehow different from the

ethnic majority, with researchers instead preferring to focus on the experiences of late adolescence and young adulthood as they relate to identity development.

While the focus on these stages makes sense in light of the classic theories on identity formation (e.g. Erikson, 1968), the lack of examination into early experiences, a focus of many autobiographical accounts, stands out.

The proposed study is designed to address the gap in the current literature regarding how children experience being different. Since the focus of this study is to understand how adolescents are able to recall and describe their early accounts of feeling or being confronted with the label of “different,” I first review the current literature on what it means to be a visibly marked ethnic minority, and what it means to be defined as *other*. I then explore the research to understand how self-identification can reflect either individuals’ understandings of themselves, or a label imposed vis-à-vis social experience and context. Finally, I discuss the vast literature on bicultural identity, and the relations between bicultural self-identification, experience, and navigation of their multiple cultural worlds.

Being Different or Othered

The idea of being different is a common one within American society, an individualist culture that often seeks to celebrate and uphold uniqueness as a standard. However, this does not mean that all differences are created equal. The meaning of what it is to be American is frequently conflated with the idea that being American also means being of a racially White, ethnically European

background (Anthony, 2012). With the vast majority of media content and advertising featuring the current racial majority (Anthony, 2012; US Census, 2012), it is easy to draw the impression that non-White skin tones and non-European ethnicities are not the norm, and thus do not fit in. While some differences, such as learning disabilities or religious practices, may not be revealed until the individual chooses to disclose such a difference, being visibly marked with differing skin color or ethnic practices may cause people to feel as though they stand out, and are easily seen.

The impact of being a visibly marked ethnic minority has been noted in identity literature by Phinney and colleagues, who note that ethnic identity can be understood in several stages for ethnic minority participants (Phinney, 1989), but White participants frequently cannot even identify their ethnicity (Phinney & Alipuria, 1990). This indicates a potential component of experience for identified minorities to feel a need for ethnic identification that majority members simply do not have. More specifically, Pufall Jones (2012) found a significant relation between experiences of differential marking, or being “made to feel different from the other members of their environment,” (p. 125) perceptions of cultural conflict, and feelings of Otherness. She also specifically notes that while feeling othered is frequently considered a factor of race or ethnicity, cultural practices are also a means by which othering can occur.

The ways difference is recognized are extremely variable based on context and type of visible or invisible markers. For example, among immigrant groups in

Canada, Lebanese immigrants are able to bank on their appearance as White individuals, whereas Somali immigrants are racialized as Black and face greater experiences of Otherness due to perceived race (Ajrouch & Kusow, 2007). While both groups share the common experience of being religious minorities, religious identification is the primary source of Otherness in the Lebanese community, but the secondary source for the Somalis. Thus the differences between the groups in terms of visible markers of ethnicity contribute strongly to the ways in which individuals come to feel othered.

Bhatia (2007) describes several different ways in which individuals may come to feel different, or other, within their social contexts. The first, Generic Otherness, is the internal recognition of being different from a perceived collective norm. The second, Marked Otherness, is the feeling that arises from having visible markers of their difference, such as skin tone, distinct accent, or forms of dress. The third and final construct, Disruptive Otherness, is the feeling of being marginalized or alienated due to experiencing racism, discrimination, and bias. Bhatia and Ram (2009) also note that various visible markings may become more or less salient based on personal or cultural experiences, such as the wearing of turbans following the events on September 11, 2001.

Despite these differences in how we construe Otherness, viewing the self and other may be a normative part of development. Inokuchi and Nozaki (2005) note that in order to understand the self, we construe ourselves “vis-à-vis the Other - somebody not ‘us’, somebody whom one cannot identify with” (p. 62). In

looking at the writings of American middle school students about the country and culture of Japan, the researchers noted that it was common for students to draw distinct boundaries between the Japanese people and themselves, utilizing language of “us” and “them.” They determined that this form of discourse is ultimately utilized to suggest “the ‘norm’ for ‘us’, and...serves to fix the identity of ‘us’” (p. 66). Similarly, Taylor (2011) discovered that adolescents often engage in othering discourses related to body fat to specifically construct themselves as normal in comparison. This allowed them to rise in social rank, and distance themselves “from the reality of everyday fatness” (p. 194), and Morris (2012) found a similar pattern among rural teenagers in relation to class-based inequality. By constructing the other as someone who is somehow socially less, children are able to navigate themselves to a better standing within the peer group social hierarchy.

While these examples are indicative of the normalcy of othering between teens in their desire to create and maintain social status, we do not have an understanding of what it means to be the one defined as other. We also do not understand how this impacts the ways an individual comes to view him or herself in relation to the non-othered group. Some research has indicated that children as young as five can be aware of their group membership and its associated social status, holding serious implications for how strongly they feel connected to their ingroup and their desires to be different (Nesdale & Flessner, 2001). As Bhatia (2007) indicates, feeling othered arises from social context, but it will not

necessarily involve the explicit actions of another individual, as we see in the descriptions of Generic and Marked Otherness. Thus, we are left wondering if there are differential experiences of being othered versus just feeling other, and whether there are lasting effects of being othered on identity development in visibly marked ethnic minority children. Is it possible for children to come to a personal conclusion that they are othered based on social context, without having it specifically imposed upon them? And if so, are there differences between these two experiences?

These questions fuel the current study. The first part of the study focuses on becoming aware of being different, and seeks to understand how this awareness is first triggered. We currently do not have an understanding of how children are differentially impacted based on the first time they were made to feel other, the context in which they first felt different, or whether it is something they were already aware of for as long as they can recall. Exploring these aspects of children's awareness of being different may help us to further understand some of the basis for identity development, as well how these early experiences may impact social and cultural navigation. In order to best understand all of these factors, we must also consider the consequences of these experiences. One primary consequence that seems likely is the labels adolescents use to self-identify, particularly due to the influence of context on choice in identification. The rationale for the focus on self-identification is based on existing research on this topic that is discussed next.

Self-Identification Labels

Social identity theory specifically posits that the labels we identify with are chosen within context, and the labels most salient and unique in the moment are what we are most likely to identify with at any given point (Operario & Fiske, 1999). Thus we identify ourselves in relation to the others around us, based upon what makes us most distinct. Similarly, social categorization theory also denotes that the labels we identify with are not static, but ever-changing to meet our need to situate ourselves in the dynamic contexts in which we participate (Oakes, Haslam, & Reynolds, 1999). Identity labels are not only based on prior experiences and recognition of specific personal traits, but are also relative to time and place.

Operario and Fiske (1999) note that this variability of labeling is also interwoven with social cognition theory. They argue for an interchanging cycle of the impact of past social experiences on cognition, which then leads to the development of specific identity labels to be chosen when they are made salient at a particular point in time. The way these labels impact us in the moment is filed away under personal experiences, which influences how we think and feel the next time we self-identify with those particular labels. This cycle continues to expand and change the way we think about ourselves, our identities, and our affiliations in relation to others in the society at large.

Nishina, Bellmore, Witkow, and Nylund-Gibson (2010) explore the ways adolescents self-identify in terms of ethnic origins, and the stability of these

identifications across time. Supporting the belief that identity labels are dynamic rather than static, nearly 40% of students shifted their ethnic identification between sixth and eighth grade. One of the most striking findings was how strongly these shifts were related to the ethnic composition of the school environment. Students were less likely to change their ethnic identification when their initial identification matched the numerical majority - e.g. an African American-identified student is less likely to pick another ethnicity to identify with when the school's majority population is also African American (Nishina et al., 2010).

Perhaps most striking of all, however, was the identification of multiethnic students. Specifically, students who identified themselves as multiethnic were the most likely to experience shifts in identification, most frequently to match the ethnic majority group, indicating a possible benefit of flexibility among adolescents who do not have a singular identification label (Nishina et al., 2010). The researchers note that ethnic self-identification in adolescence may be a precursor to the development of ethnic identity. Adolescents have the freedom to "try on" different labels to fit their dynamic environments, utilizing such labels in a quest for identity exploration, which in turn informs their search for identity achievement.

Further looking at the impact of identity labels are Kiang and colleagues. Kiang and Luu (2013) note that a crucial component is missing in how we come to choose our ethnic identification: How our chosen labels correspond with those

imposed by others. Kiang (2008) argues that young American adults from non-European backgrounds need to make choices about their self-categorization, and indicates four possible categories they may fall into: a heritage ethnicity label such as Chinese, a panethnic label such as Asian, or two forms of hyphenation, either heritage-American (e.g. Chinese-American), or panethnic-American (e.g. Asian American). Kiang (2008) found that it is difficult to determine whether panethnic labels are used out of a conscious choice for socio-political reasons, or if it is a default “easy option” provided by social institution. Interestingly, Kiang notes that the use of a heritage-American label seems to indicate, “a deeper process involved retaining a heritage national sense of identification,” (p. 107) and greater ethnic exploration.

These label choices can also be strongly impacted by social context. Looking at immigrant communities, Kiang, Perreira, and Fuligni (2011) discovered that Asian and Latino teens in areas without a large immigrant population overwhelmingly chose to identify with specific ethnic heritage or panethnic labels, without American hyphenation. In contrast, teens in areas with a large immigrant population are far more likely to endorse a bicultural, or hyphenated-American, identity. Kiang, Perreira, and Fuligni (2011) believe this indicates the greater flexibility in identifying as American adolescents have when they are surrounded by greater resources to support community integration, whereas adolescents in the atypical communities are very much in the ethnic and racial minority, pushing them to specifically identify with their ethnic heritage. In

light of this, it is possible there is a connection between imposed social labels and self-identification, where experiences with others will influence adolescents' choices in labels to fit in with what is socially acceptable in context.

Finally, working with a population of Asian American adolescents, Kiang and Luu (2013) attempted to understand the direct impact of peer-imposed labels on self-labeling. The concordance rate between self-identification and peer-imposed labels fell between 22% for European American peers, and 36% for Asian American peers. Interestingly, while Kiang and Luu (2013) found that there were generally very few impacts on adjustment, they did find that when European American peers identified Asian American teens with non-heritage or mistaken heritage labeling, specifically self-identifying with their heritage was correlated with more positive emotion for the Asian American teens. However, a similar study among South African adult immigrants to Australia indicated that while participants outright rejected the negative labels imposed upon them by others, they still internalized the associated negative stereotypes (Sonn & Fisher, 1996).

Something implicit in these variable identification labels is the notion of biculturalism. Individuals can only make the conscious decision to self-identify in these varying ways if they feel they have personal ties to multiple cultural backgrounds. The following section explores the literature pertaining to the development of bicultural identity, and how individuals come to understand and relate to more than one culture.

Bicultural Identity Integration

The complexities of ethnic and cultural self-identification are exacerbated when more than one culture must be considered. Among the studies previously described, particularly those of Kiang and colleagues, individuals had multiple options of identification based on the combination of their ethnic and national heritages. In order to best understand how multiple cultures influence identity, we need to understand how individuals will commonly resolve their biculturality.

Benet-Martinez and colleagues have discussed the idea of bicultural identity integration, based on the idea that two dimensions predominantly affect bicultural individuals: cultural distance and cultural conflict between the ethnic and mainstream cultural orientations (Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005; Haritatos & Benet-Martinez, 2002). These two dimensions are formed by the subjective, individual experience of two cultures and whether they are oppositional/contradictory, or compatible/complementary, and are believed to be causal indicators of bicultural identity integration (Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005). They have also been shown to have predictive ability on various forms of cultural functioning.

One such study is that of Benet-Martinez, Leu, Lee, and Morris (2002), who examined the influence of bicultural identity integration (BII) on cultural frame switching. Within a sample of first-generation Chinese American students, participants were randomly assigned to be primed with either Chinese or American cultural icons, such as the Statue of Liberty or the Great Wall of China.

Participants were then given an inferential task, interpreting the actions of a fish. Participants who were high in BII, and thus believed their two cultures to be compatible and complementary, were prime-consistent. This means they made external attributions typical of more collectivist Chinese culture when primed with Chinese icons, and internal attributions typical of more independent American culture when primed with American icons. However, participants who were low in BII, seeing their two cultures as opposite and contradictory, showed the opposite pattern; Chinese primes elicited internal, American-style attributions, and American primes elicited external, Chinese-style attributions. Benet-Martinez et al. (2002) hypothesized that this persistent prime-resistance may result in the experience of negative feedback from peers and elders, causing an individual to feel “too Chinese,” in typical American settings, and “too American,” in more Chinese settings.

In another study, Mexican-American bicultural individuals were asked to describe personalities of the “typical American” and “typical Mexican,” and then rate how closely they felt their own personalities were aligned with the descriptions. Participants who rated high on BII were likely to view their own personalities as being very closely aligned with both the typical American and typical Mexican, results which were later replicated with a more inclusive Latino-American sample population (Miramontez, Benet-Martinez, & Nguyen, 2008). Clearly then, the implications of these personal beliefs regarding the attributes of self and others must be underscored, because the nature “of their cultural in-

groups affects the nature of their intergroup attitudes and social perceptions” (p. 441).

Thus, it would seem that having a high BII would be a more beneficial orientation than a low BII, or the belief that one’s disparate ethnic and mainstream cultures are at odds. However, Benet-Martinez and colleagues are still exploring exactly what makes bicultural individuals believe their two cultures are either compatible or contradictory. One explanation, put forth by Benet-Martinez and Haritatos (2005) is that cultural conflict is predicted by acculturation stress; individuals who experience problems with discrimination, struggle with linguistic differences, and perceive strained intercultural relations are going to rate very high conflict between their ethnic and mainstream cultures, thus resulting in low integration. Additionally, variations may be linked to various personality traits: neurotic individuals are more likely to perceive conflict between their identities where agreeable ones would not, whereas extroverted individuals are less likely to experience stress from their surrounding environments.

Once again, we see the assertion that experience, and personal interpretation thereof, play a very large role in the resolution of identity, or in this case the integration of multiple identities. However, personal experiences remain unexamined, with assumptions based on the likelihood of reactions frequently stemming from specific personality paradigms. Benet-Martinez and Haritatos (2005) also note that cultural distance, as opposed to cultural conflict, may be more a personal choice related to personal affirmation of similarity or

differentiation from cultures, and “speculate that, as biculturals’ exposure to the mainstream culture increases, perceptions of cultural distance would decrease” (p. 1041) based on findings that the length of time spent in the U.S. was directly correlated with cultural distance. Thus, length of time in the U.S. combined with personal experience between cultures is believed to be associated with integration of cultural identities.

Identity Development

In order to truly understand identity development, it’s necessary to understand the underlying processes rather than just the stages or end goal. Stephen, Fraser and Marcia (1992) posit that adolescents often begin in a stage of either foreclosure, an unexplored identity commitment; or diffusion, a lack of identity commitment. At some point, an identity crisis will occur to launch an adolescent into identity moratorium, or exploration, during which “relevant choices will be made from the roles, beliefs and attitudes experimented with earlier” (Stephen, Fraser, & Marcia, 1992, p. 296). From there, a commitment is made to an identity, resulting in identity achievement. However, this achievement is not necessarily stable over the lifetime; rather, individuals may engage in a moratorium-achievement-moratorium-achievement cycle (MAMA), as the achievement is thrown into disequilibrium from experiences that result in changing beliefs and attitudes.

Stephen, Fraser, and Marcia (1992) also note that while the MAMA cycle is likely most common, it is also possible for individuals to revert back to

foreclosure or diffusion. They argue that some may refuse to engage in further exploration, resulting in another diffusion state, and others may attempt to keep their identity the same, despite otherwise changing values. Supporting these claims are Meeus, Iedema, Helsen, and Vollebergh (1999) who found that periods of achieving relational identity, or identity in the context of others, increase with age, while the number of diffusion periods decrease. Interestingly, Meeus et al. argue that psychological wellbeing is tied to each of these stages, and that foreclosure and achievement may be adaptive statuses as opposed to the flux that are moratorium and diffusion.

Meeus et al. (1999) also found support for the claim that identity development does not primarily happen during late adolescence; rather, they suggest it continues at a steady pace throughout the adolescent years. Instead, participants in young adulthood showed greater stability in relational identity development over time, particularly those in identity achievement.

The present study aims to help understand a snapshot of adolescent identity development through the examination of self-identification. As indicated by Nishina et al. (2010), self-identification labels may be a part of identity moratorium as they can be used in the exploration process. In addition to this, given the work done by Stephen, Fraser, and Marcia (1992) as well as Meeus et al. (1999) it is possible that identity labels may be part of identity achievement or identity foreclosure as part of a normative identity development process.

Research Questions

Much of the literature reviewed covers separate facets of the proposed study, including the following: the way Otherness is perpetuated by a majority group and experienced by visibly marked minorities; the apparent influences on how individuals come to choose their self-identification; and how people resolve being of more than one culture. While the literature is quite rich in these areas independently, very little covers the potential for interaction between them. The following research questions guide the current study to explore the possibility of these interactions:

1. How do ethnic minority adolescents recall the first time they became aware of feeling different, or other, from the majority population, and can these experiences be categorized using Bhatia's (2007) conceptualization of Otherness?
2. What identity labels do ethnic minority adolescents choose to utilize, and how are these differentially related to how they define their awareness of Otherness? Specifically, does an internal, affective realization of Otherness lead to a different self-identification as seen through identity labels when compared to an external, imposed Otherness?
3. How are these differential experiences of Otherness, and differences in labeling categories, related to how ethnic minority adolescents believe they are perceived by the general public, and how they rate their cultural commitment, affiliation and comfort?

Methods

Due to the focus on understanding the relations between Otherness, experience, and self-identification, the current study was designed using a mixed-methods approach in order to adequately capture the detail involved in each of these constructs. The data for the study comes from a larger study originally intended to develop a reliable measure for cultural navigation, which included a survey instrument as well as an open-ended, semi-structured interview.

Sample and Recruitment

The sample for this study consists of data from two sets of 13-17 year old adolescents. These data were collected as part of a larger study, *Navigating Across Cultures*. The participants include a sample of 22 Asian American teens ranging in age from 13 to 17 years old, recruited at community health centers and clinics serving an urban Asian American community, and a sample of 19 teens aged 13-18 years representing diverse urban and ethnic backgrounds (Mistry et al., 2008). These two data sets were selected specifically for the proposed study, because the participants were adolescents ranging in age from 13-17 years old and therefore considered to be in the midst of identity development (Stephen, Fraser, & Marcia, 1992; Meeus et al., 1999). The two samples represented diversity of ethnic backgrounds.

The sample of 22 Asian American teens was recruited for an honors thesis by Diep (2007). Recruitment took place at both the Asian Psychiatry Clinic and the Asian Pediatric and Adolescent Clinical Services Program of the Tufts-New

England Medical Center, both of which are affiliated with the Tufts-New England Medical Center. Participants were initially made aware of the study via an informational flier at the registration desk of both clinics, physician referrals to patients and/or their parents, and face-to-face recruitment techniques in the clinic waiting rooms. As all participants were minors, written informed consent was obtained from both the participants and their parents or legal guardians. Because not all participants had parents or guardians present at the time, they were given the option to arrange a separate appointment to complete the study once full informed consent had been obtained.

The sample of 19 teens from diverse ethnic minority backgrounds were recruited through the Welcome Project (<http://www.welcomeproject.org>), a community-based support organization for immigrants in Somerville, to assist them in becoming involved in the community and strengthen their self-advocacy skills. These teens were recruited from the project's youth programs. Members of the NAC research project team contacted the Executive Director of the Welcome Project and the Youth Programs Coordinator to explain the study as the first step in establishing an ongoing partnership with the organization. The Director and Program Coordinator invited youth to participate in the study, and consent forms from both the youth and their parents/guardians were obtained prior to data collection. These participants were interviewed by the principle investigator or one of the study's research assistants, each from differing ethnic backgrounds.

Data Collection and Measures

Two forms of data were collected from each participant. Participants completed the NACS (Navigating Across Cultures Scale) and also participated in a semi-structured interview, with standard questions regarding their experiences of feeling different, the age at which they first felt different, and their reactions surrounding the events. Since the data collection procedure varied for the two samples, these procedures are described separately for each sample.

For the first sample of Asian American adolescents, participants completed two paper questionnaires during the first 30-40 minutes of the session, which included the NACS questionnaire, and the Youth Self Report which is not utilized for this study. Participants were then engaged in the semi-structured, 15-25 minute interview with the researcher, an Asian American female. Following this interview, participants were debriefed and received compensation in the form of a one-month subscription to Netflix.com or \$10.00 in cash (Diep, 2007).

For the sample recruited from the Welcome Project, participants took part in focus groups of 3-5 students led by a researcher. The questions of the focus group included discussing the notion of navigating across cultures and what the participants believed it meant. During these focus groups, the participants were given the opportunity to complete the written portion of the NACS, after which they participated in either individual or small-group interviews. During these interviews, participants were asked to give feedback on the written scale, and then participate in a semi-structured interview. Only the participants who were

interviewed individually were included in the sample. For those participants who were interviewed in small groups, it was not possible to document and track individual experiences, so these participants have been excluded from the current study. Thus, across the two samples, 24 participants constitute the sample for this study.

Navigating Across Cultures Scale. Participants in both samples were administered the Navigating Across Cultures Scale (NACS; Mistry et al., 2008). NACS is a 52 item questionnaire/survey instrument that assesses specific dimensions of biculturality, such as extent of affiliation with heritage culture, with mainstream American culture, extent of participation and commitment to each of these cultures, etc. The scale also includes items to assess perceptions of discrimination, perceptions of public regard for cultural heritage communities as well as background and demographic information. The second type of data was elicited through a semi-structured interview process designed to collect a more descriptive history of the participant's experiences of living in and navigating multiple cultural worlds/settings. Together, these two sets of data provide both a categorical and a nuanced understanding of the individual's perceptions of his or her lived experiences as a participant in mainstream American culture and his or her culture of heritage, as well as how they perceive their own biculturality and affiliation with multiple groups.

The quantitative scale was designed by Mistry et al. (2008) based on the conceptual understanding of Rogoff's (2003) description of culture as

communities of practice, as well as the competencies necessary to function in multiple cultures set forth by LaFramboise et al. (1993). The scale consists of four subscales designed to assess the extent of a participant's cultural navigation: (1) Affiliation and comfort with, (2) knowledge of, (3) participation in, and (4) commitment to the multiple cultures in which the participant resides (Mistry et al., 2008). Additionally, the NACS contains items to help assess background information and experiences that are theorized to be correlates of biculturality, such as self-identification, diversity of peer groups, perception of discrimination, and perception of public regard for heritage cultures.

The accompanying qualitative interview was administered by interviewers in a semi-structured form in order to get greater depth into the personal accounts of experiences of having to live in and navigate multiple cultural communities. It also allowed the freedom for participants to include other relevant information such as stories of their childhood experiences navigating cultures, experiences of being labeled as different, or specific encounters with racism. The more structured questionnaire (NAC) enabled eliciting responses from a standard set of items that could be quantified to enable statistical analysis to answer the current research questions. The semi-structured interviews consisted of a set of standard interview questions including the participant's identification and ethnicity, where the participant was born, if and when the participant first realized he or she felt different from others, what the participant would change about his or her culture, and how the participant feels the public regards his or her ethnic group.

Coding of interview data. The individual participant interviews were initially coded utilizing ATLAS.ti, an analytical program for qualitative data. The existing interviews were used to develop the following coding scheme to ensure that questions asked of participants were relatively uniform and pertinent to the current study. This involved an initial coding process revolving around the primary constructs of the study: self-identification, circumstances surrounding an initial awareness of Otherness, cultural affiliation, and public regard. The following codes were developed in relation to these categories, with the strict limitation that codes were limited to participant responses to specific questions regarding the first time they realized they were different, their related experiences and reactions, and any subsequent experiences identified by participants as being related to this phenomenon.

1. Self-identification

- *Heritage.* The ethnic heritage claimed by participants, which may be different from the identity labels they use to describe themselves.
- *Identity.* The specific identity labels participants utilize to describe themselves, which may or may not be the same as their identified ethnic heritage. These labels will be categorized utilizing the types of ethnic identification previously described by Kiang (2008).

2. Circumstances of becoming aware of difference

- *Age at awareness.* The age participants recall being at the time they remember the first time they felt different from mainstream American

culture. This is a categorical label, as most participants can only identify an approximate age (e.g. in elementary school), rather than specific.

- *Awareness experience.* Whether participants came to feel different from a self-comparison of their experiences and actions as opposed to what they viewed mainstream American culture was like, or whether it was imposed upon them by other people in either a positive or negative manner.
- *Otherness.* Whether the awareness experience can be constituted as Generic, Marked, or Disruptive Otherness.

3. Affiliation

- *Cultural preference.* Participants' explicitly stated preference for either their heritage culture or mainstream American culture.
- *Cultural pride.* Explicitly stated happiness or pride for affiliation with heritage culture, even in circumstances of stated preference for American culture.
- *Parent perception.* Whether the participant believes he or she would be labeled by parents as being "Americanized," even if the participant does not personally identify with American culture.

4. Public perceptions

- *Change.* What participants indicate they would change about their cultural group or how they are seen by the public.

- *Public regard.* How the participant believes the general public views his or her ethnic group as a whole.

5. Background Information

- *Birthplace.* Whether the participant was born in or outside of the US. Not enough participants were born outside the US to warrant coding specific birth countries.
- *Home language.* The language spoken in the participants' home when the participant was growing up, which may be understood but not spoken by the participant.

Quantitative variables. The quantitative data used for analysis was taken from the NACS. Within this scale, specific variables were chosen to answer the designated research questions. These variables provide a more standardized rating of how the participants perceive their cultural group is regarded by mainstream America which allowed for statistical analysis. Aside from the general demographic information, these variables were as follows:

1. Affiliation with heritage culture, assessed with six questions
 - “I have a strong sense of belonging to my cultural group.”
 - “I think of myself as being [a member of my cultural group].”
 - “In general, being [a member of my cultural group] is an important part of my self-image.”
 - “Rate yourself on how well you fit in with other people of the same cultural group.”

- “I feel good about being [a member of my cultural group].”
 - “I am comfortable being [a member of my cultural group].”
2. Affiliation with mainstream American culture, assessed with six questions
- “I have a strong sense of belonging to American (mainstream) culture.”
 - “I think of myself as being American (mainstream).”
 - “In general, being American (mainstream) is an important part of my self-image.”
 - “Rate yourself on how well you fit in with people who are American (mainstream).”
 - “I feel good about being American (mainstream).”
 - “I am comfortable being American (mainstream).”
3. Commitment to heritage culture, assessed with four questions
- “I think it is important for parents to surround their children with the art, music and literature of their cultural group.”
 - “In general, I agree with the values of my cultural group (e.g., about marriage, families, education, work).”
 - “In general, values of my cultural group are an important part of my life.”
 - “In the future, it will be important to me to raise my children with the values of my cultural group.”

4. Commitment to mainstream American culture, assessed with five questions
 - “My cultural group should strive to be full members of the American political system.”
 - “My cultural group should view themselves as being Americans first and foremost.”
 - “I think the values of my cultural group are similar to American (mainstream) values.”
 - “In general, mainstream American values are an important part of my life.”
 - “In the future, it will be important to me to raise my children with mainstream American values.”

5. Perception of public regard, assessed with four questions
 - “I worry about how my life will be affected by my belonging to [cultural group].”
 - “I feel that my cultural group has made major accomplishments and advancements.”
 - “I often feel that my cultural group is not regarded well by society in general.”
 - “I think that my cultural group is in the mainstream of America more than ever before.”

Each question was rated by participants on a likert scale ranging from either 1-3 or 1-5. Ratings were converted to z-scores for standardization before being combined to form the variables for analysis.

Analysis and Results

To best address the first research question, a summary was created from each interview using the quotes found during the initial coding process. This enabled me to easily consider each participant's recollection of their initial awareness experience in order to appropriately code it as Generic, Marked, or Disruptive Otherness. Upon preliminary coding utilizing only these initial experiences of awareness, eight participants described an experience of Generic Otherness, nine described an experience Marked Otherness, five described an experience of Disruptive Otherness, and two did not clearly fall within any category. Table 1 shows an example of a quotation from each category.

Further examination of these quotes in relation to participants' other recollections, however, revealed that the first awareness of Otherness described by participants was not exemplary of their experiences as a whole. Additionally, the distinction between Marked and Generic Otherness was not quite as clear as the distinction between those categories and Disruptive Otherness. Therefore it was deemed appropriate by the coders to take a more holistic approach to coding participant recollections in order to best capture the sum of their experiences for analysis. To this effect, all participants who recalled any experience of Disruptive Otherness were coded as such, while participants who did not recall Disruptive

experiences were coded as either Marked or Generic Otherness. Reliability coding for Otherness was performed on one third of the sample ($n=8$), and a Cohen's κ indicated strong agreement between coders ($\kappa=1.0, p<.005$).

The results of this more holistic approach indicated a more clear distinction between Disruptive and Marked Otherness, with only one participant indicating a clear experience of Generic Otherness. The following sections explore participant recollections of their experiences with Otherness, in order to answer the first research question: How do ethnic minority adolescents recall the first time they became aware of feeling different, or other, from the majority population, and can these experiences be categorized using Bhatia's (2007) conceptualization of Otherness?

Generic Otherness

Only a single participant was reliably coded into the category of Generic Otherness. While this participant explicitly recognized an awareness of being different, he could not describe any specific experiences which caused him to feel *othered*. Additional experiences that may have been considered to be Generic Otherness were in need of further clarification, which was unavailable given that this was secondary analysis of the data. As such, Generic Otherness was not able to be explored within the bounds of this particular study.

Experiences of Disruptive Otherness

From Bhatia's (2007) description of Disruptive Otherness, it is usually experienced in the context of racism, bias, or other forms of discrimination.

Following this description as a very basic guideline, eleven participants clearly described experiences of Disruptive Otherness, and six of these participants described experiences that involved blatant racism and other negative experiences. As one participant recalls,

“There was one time I got beat up on the bus I was in the sixth grade. There was this bi-lingual girl and she didn’t speak English so we were speaking in Cantonese and this guy comes on the bus, got on the bus and just whacked us [and told us to shut up] and I managed to get off the bus go home and called my mom she came home and she called the superintendent office in downtown, she call the bus transportation, the bus driver did not do anything the next day I got to school, my friends told me, my friends are black and they knew about it they were pretty cool with me. ‘The guy that hit you can’t take the bus no more he got suspended.’”

In this recollection, the participant indicates feeling distinctly *othered* due to the direct influence of another person, in this case a boy who “whacked” her and said “shut up” while she was speaking in another language. While many experiences were similar in that they involved a particular interaction or series of repeated interactions with other people, not all participants described direct conversations or experiences with other people. For example, one participant notes an experience of racism that involved indirect contact:

“We live in America and there are a lot of racist people; at school on the wall near the lockers it was like ‘Stupid gooks go back to China.’ Gooks, China doesn’t even match. Things like that could be a factor.”

This particular experience was perpetrated by someone else despite a lack of direct interaction with another individual. Implicit in seeing this message at school is the fact that someone else must feel strongly that the students from China did not belong there. Therefore, consistent with the prior description as well as Bhatia’s (2007) brief explanation of Disruptive Otherness, this was both instigated by another individual and an experience of racism.

In addition to these six participants, most participants who were categorized as experiencing Disruptive Otherness described instances specifically involving stereotyping. The five participants who were categorized under Disruptive Otherness, but who did not describe recollections of overt racism, all described repeated instances of stereotyping, in most cases racial stereotyping. One participant recalls,

“They say you are Asian you are supposed to be smart. And I go like, ‘so what if I am Asian can you just do your homework.’ ...they say, ‘can I see your homework,’ no I don’t do it, they go like, ‘you are supposed to be smart you are Asian.’ So what, I’m Asian.”

Regardless of the intentions of the other individuals, the participant was still subject to repeated racial stereotyping; in this case the belief that as a group,

Asians are smart. However, not all stereotypes experienced were necessarily racialized; as one participant described,

“When I was little I had my hair braided, and it was real new to White kids at school. So yeah, they brought that up so....No, it wasn't that they said bad things to me. Because like, girls have their hair braided, so...‘Oh, he's a girl, he's a girl.’”

This participant was confronted with the fact that his cultural practice of having his hair braided was not seen by his peers as fitting gender norms. Rather than facing racial stereotypes, he was instead teased for exhibiting what they saw as a female characteristic of braided hair, and was faced with not conforming to male stereotypes.

Thus, as a whole, all experiences of Disruptive Otherness experienced by the participants in this study were initiated by another person, whether through a direct interaction or an indirect form of contact. Additionally, these experiences took different shapes, but despite a predominant theme of participants being racialized by peers, this was not always a driving factor in experiences of Disruptive Otherness.

Experiences of Marked Otherness

Unlike the descriptions of Disruptive Otherness, experiences of Marked Otherness were not always reported as being caused by another individual. However, these experiences were very clearly derived from social context, if not

social interaction. Additionally, most participants described experiences of Marked Otherness, including those who described Disruptive Otherness.

One of the most distinctive features of many of the Marked Otherness experiences is the notion of cultural marking, specifically. Rather than being instigated by another person, these experiences were often internal, affective realizations on the part of a participant, upon discovery of differences in cultural practices from the participant's friends. One participant describes,

“My friend talks about during Easter their parents are hiding eggs around the house and I say, ‘hey my parents don’t do that.’ They [my friends] go to concerts, even basketball and stuff. I never do that actually.”

Not only does this participant link her feeling of being different to cultural practices, she extends beyond to see differences between other activities her friends take part in that she does not. Additionally, the actual experience of Otherness was not instigated by her peers; rather, she realizes her family does not partake in those particular cultural practices, effectively marking herself as being culturally *other*. Similar experiences were noted by other participants, indicating that major holidays may serve as triggers of Marked Otherness due to differing cultural practices that are linked to holiday celebrations.

However, cultural practices as reasons for Marked Otherness were not limited to major events. Some participants instead noted differences in practices at home, such as one participant who said,

“I started noticing the world more like the people around me how they [people of different races] act differently from how I do. The way they are and how they are at home...Like taking off your shoes. I took off my shoes when I went into my friend’s house and she said, ‘Oh, we don’t take them off.’ She walks around in her room with shoes on. I am like, ‘This is the first time I have ever done that. I don’t want to dirty the place,’ and she says, ‘That’s okay.’ Simple stuff like that.”

This participant notes differences in what is allowed in her home as opposed to her friend’s home, but explicitly links it to ethnic heritage, later indicating she specifically sees these differences between practices of her ethnic community and those of her Caucasian and African American friends. In this event, she is also experiencing self-marking from her own comparison of cultures and practices, rather than having it imposed upon her by her friends.

Otherness related to cultural marking did occur from experiences with other people as well. The participants who described being marked as opposed to self-marking predominantly indicated that it came from their parents, rather than peers. One participant mentioned, “Well, just like your parents telling you like where you come from, where they come from,” indicating a form of explicit instruction regarding their ethnic and cultural heritage. Some participants described experiences of being introduced to television programs with news or history, discussions of current events, and other forms of knowledge-sharing with their parents regarding their parents’ countries of origin.

A more typical cause of Marked Otherness was seen in recollections of participants who indicated that visible markings resulted in their awareness of being *othered*. As one participant recalls,

“Well they, first of all they don’t even know that Vietnam existed....when I used to go to school they used to be like, ‘Are you Chinese, are you Japanese?’ And I would be like, ‘I am from Vietnam’ and they’d be like ‘What is Vietnam?’ And I used to be like, ‘It’s a country next to Cambodia.’ And it used to be like that, they didn’t even know it existed. So I guess in a way we kind of didn’t exist to them...”

Unlike experiences of Disruptive Otherness, this and similar experiences of Marked Otherness resulted from what participants described as peers’ questioning out of curiosity, rather than a confrontation of the difference. The differences at the heart of these descriptions included physical characteristics and languages.

In general there was a great deal of overlapping experience types for participants. Most participants described an experience of Marked Otherness, while some went on to describe further experiences of Disruptive Otherness. Yet others described further experiences that could not be definitively categorized without more information. For analytical purposes, all eleven participants who experienced Disruptive Otherness were categorized by it, while twelve participants were categorized by Marked Otherness alone, and one participant was

categorized by Generic Otherness. These categorizations were used for following analyses.

Self-Identification and Otherness

Participants' self-identification labels, as expressed in their interviews, were categorized using Kiang's (2008) categories of self-identification. For these purposes, participants who identified with multiple backgrounds (e.g. Chinese and Vietnamese) were still considered to self-identify as Ethnic, as they used specific national labels rather than claiming Pan-Ethnic identification (e.g. Asian). Of the 24 participants, seven identified as Ethnic, five as Pan-Ethnic, four as Ethnic-American, six as Panethnic-American, and two participants were found to self-identify as American-only (see Figure 1). Reliability coding was completed for one third of the sample (n=8), with a test for Cohen's κ showing a strong inter-rater reliability ($\kappa=.833, p<.001$).

These five label types were collapsed into two different dichotomous variables to provide for better statistical analysis given the small sample size. The first variable was created by combining the Ethnic and Ethnic-American categories to represent those who identified with a Specific National Heritage (n=11) while the Pan-Ethnic, Panethnic-American, and American categories were combined to represent Pan-Ethnic labels (n=13).

The second dichotomous variable combined the Ethnic and Pan-Ethnic categories to represent Ethnic Heritage (n=12), while the Ethnic-American, Panethnic-American, and American categories were combined to represent

Bicultural Identification (n=12). American-identified participants were included in this category, because even though they labeled themselves as American to assert their claim to this heritage, they were in effect acknowledging their dual heritage because as ethnic minorities, as their ethnic heritage was taken for granted even if not explicitly labeled.

As previously mentioned, participants were typically coded within two categories of Otherness, Marked and Disruptive, with only one participant categorized as Generic. For quantitative purposes, the Generic Otherness category was merged with the Marked Otherness category, for analysis between Disruptive and Non-disruptive Otherness.

Two chi-squares were completed between this variable and the two variables indicating self-identification. The percentage of participants who identified with a Specific National Heritage did differ by Disruptive or Non-disruptive Otherness at the .10 level ($X^2(1, n=24)=2.818, p=.093$) (see Figure 2), but the percentage of participants who identified as Bicultural did not differ between Disruptive and Non-disruptive Otherness ($X^2(1, n=24)=.168, p=.68$).

Self-Identification, Otherness, and Factors of Cultural Navigation

Independent samples t-tests were conducted with the two self-identification variables to compare participants' scores of Heritage Culture Commitment and American Culture Commitment with their identification. For participants identifying themselves with a Specific National Heritage, Commitment to Heritage Culture was higher ($m=.13, sd= 0.7$) than Panethnic-

identified participants ($m=-.33$, $sd=0.6$) which was statistically significant at an alpha level of .10 ($t(22)=-1.799$, $p=.086$). Similarly, they also had lower score for Commitment to American Culture ($m=-.07$, $sd=0.6$) than their Panethnic-identified counterparts ($m=.33$, $sd=0.5$), which was statistically significant at the .10 level ($t(22)=1.743$, $p=.095$) (see Figure 3). However, no significant differences were found on the measure of Heritage Culture Comfort and Affiliation ($t(22)=-.662$, $p=.515$), American Culture Comfort and Affiliation ($t(17.4)=1.034$, $p=.315$), or Public Regard ($t(22)=-.431$, $p=.67$).

Further, identification as Ethnic vs. Bicultural did not have a significant impact on scores for either American Culture Commitment ($t(22)=.43$, $p=.67$) or Heritage Culture Commitment ($t(17.6)=-0.17$, $p=.87$). Additionally, no significant differences were found for Heritage Culture Comfort and Affiliation ($t(22)=-1.31$, $p=.20$), American Culture Comfort and Affiliation ($t(22)=-.001$, $p=.999$), or Public Regard ($t(17)=.88$, $p=.39$).

Independent-samples t-tests were also conducted between types of Otherness and the variables of Cultural Commitment, Affiliation and Comfort, and Public Regard, in order to determine whether Otherness related differently than self-Identification. Participants who experienced Disruptive Otherness were more likely to rate their Heritage Culture Commitment lower ($m=-.43$, $sd=.56$) than those who had only experienced Non-disruptive Otherness ($m=.14$, $sd=.64$), which was significant at an alpha level of .05 ($t(22)=2.27$, $p=.03$). No significant differences were found for American Culture Commitment ($t(22)=.311$, $p=.76$),

Heritage Culture Affiliation and Comfort ($t(22)=-.80, p=.43$), American Culture Affiliation and Comfort ($t(22)=-.423, p=.68$) or Public Regard ($t(22)=.505, p=.62$).

Discussion

One of the primary objectives of the study was to understand if and how the experiences of ethnic minority adolescents could be categorized by Bhatia's (2007) categories of Otherness. In the present study, I was able to categorize several types of experiences that fell under either Marked Otherness or Disruptive Otherness, while Generic Otherness was much more difficult to determine without further information. Experiences of Disruptive Otherness only occurred in the context of being initiated by another individual, and while these experiences were usually the result of a direct interaction with another, they were occasionally indirect, such as experiencing racist graffiti at school. Disruptive Otherness generally took the form of harassment by peers, often for the physical features associated with race, negative associations with stereotypes, or other actions that the participants associated with their ethnic identification.

Marked Otherness took on a very different form. Rather than being initiated or imposed by a peer, it was often created in the context of peer discussions and usually out of either self-comparison by the participants, or curiosity of their peers. One very surprising discovery was the fact that participants who actually marked themselves as being *other* often did so based on differences in cultural practices rather than the visible markings associated with

race. This is a very interesting implication to the idea of being marked, given that these participants did not have these marked differences pointed out by anyone but themselves.

In addition to understanding how Bhatia's categories of Otherness could be operationalized, another objective of the study was to understand how the categories were related to participants' self-identification, their ratings of cultural commitment, affiliation and comfort, and perceptions of public regard. In this respect, the experience of Disruptive Otherness seemed to be most significant in terms of observed differences on the variables from the NACS. Participants categorized in the Disruptive Otherness category were more likely to identify themselves with a Pan-Ethnic label (e.g. Asian, Asian American, or American) than a label of Specific National Heritage (e.g. Chinese, Haitian; see figure 2). These participants also had lower ratings of commitment to their heritage culture than participants who had only experienced Marked Otherness.

Self-identification was also related to cultural commitment. Participants who identified with a Specific National Heritage were more likely to rate their Heritage Cultural Commitment higher, and their American Culture Commitment lower, compared to those who identified with Pan-Ethnic labels. A particularly noteworthy observation is that participants identifying with a Specific National Heritage indicated commitment to both Heritage Culture and American Culture, while participants identifying with a Pan-Ethnic label had a contrasting pattern: low commitment to Cultural Heritage and high commitment to American Culture

(see Figure 3). Because self-identification was related to both forms of cultural commitment, but Otherness was only related to Heritage Culture Commitment, it stands to reason that despite self-identification and Otherness being related to each other, they may each be independently related to Heritage Culture Commitment.

Given the evidence that Otherness may be differentially related to Heritage Culture Commitment, as well as its relation with Self-Identification, there is ample reason to suggest that Otherness is a meaningful construct which can be used to understand the motives behind ethnic minorities' capabilities in cultural navigation. Despite constraints that limit the possibility of drawing causal conclusions from these results, the distinctive relations found in the present study warrant further investigation into Otherness, and how it affects the lives of minorities.

Additionally the findings regarding self-identification contribute to the current literature of adolescent identification by supporting new angles from which to unpack the reasons behind adolescents' choice in identity labels. While the current study was unable to answer Kiang's (2008) question of whether adolescents choose Pan-Ethnic labels intentionally or if they are a default, imposed option, the links between Pan-Ethnic identification and experiences of Disruptive Otherness provide another avenue to explore for explanatory relations. It is possible that such experiences tend to lead adolescents to choose Pan-Ethnic identification in order to emphasize other strengths or foster discussions;

supporting this suggestion, Pollock (2004) discovered that mixed-race youth often employ racial labels strategically. Interviewing students at a school with a high population of mixed-race adolescents, Pollock discovered that students often used simplistic racial categories in order to foster a stronger discussion of the realities of being ethnic minorities, while still acknowledging and holding true to their mixed backgrounds. This precedence indicates possible similarities between the strategies employed around race and ethnicity by adolescents of mixed-race and those who are bicultural.

Another interesting interpretation of these results is based on the assertions of Benet-Martinez and colleagues with regard to Bicultural Identity Integration. Benet-Martinez and Haritatos (2005) indicate that individuals who experience conflict such as racism or discrimination would be less likely to call themselves bicultural. In the current study, however, participants who experienced such Disruptive Otherness were no less likely to self-identify as bicultural as those who only experienced Non-disruptive Otherness; instead, they were more likely to self-identify as Pan-Ethnic or Panethnic-American. The meaning of this is not explained by the results at hand, but it is suggestive of possible dissociation from a specific ethnicity or national heritage due to conflict. A second rationale for this could have less to do with biculturalism, and more to do with a need for group affiliation. Participants may become inclined to identify with a Pan-Ethnic group after experiencing a confrontation of Disruptive Otherness in order to affiliate themselves with a larger group than just those sharing their Ethnic

Heritage. In a sense, this may reflect a mindset of safety in numbers, with participants moving to affiliate with larger power axes out of a conscious or unconscious desire for support and social protection.

Alternatively, it could be that participants feel such an identity is imposed upon them, rather than having the flexibility to choose for themselves. This is indicative of the Perpetual Foreigner stereotype (Huynh, Devos, & Smalarz, 2011), where ethnic minorities are seen only as “foreign,” and “not American.” While the Perpetual Foreigner stereotype is also linked to ethnic minorities likelihood of identifying as American, which as mentioned is not consistent with the results of the present study, it is also likely that they will not have their specific ethnic heritages validated. Indeed, as some participants mentioned, it can be easier to identify as Pan-Ethnic rather than correct people who make assumptions otherwise. However, it is also contradictory of the findings that Pan-Ethnic identified participants rated their commitment to American culture higher than their peers who did identify with a specific ethnic heritage. This very much indicates a need for further research to better clarify what cultural commitment means to ethnic minority adolescents, and how it may intersect with their self-identification.

Further, an important point to consider involves the relation between self-identification and identity development. Nishina et al. (2010) indicated the possible use of identification labels as a form of identity exploration, and the related effects between identification labels and experiences of Otherness show

there are many possibilities to unpack. For one, it has been noted that we often begin to identify ourselves in relation to others (Inokuchi & Nozaki, 2005), indicating the personal use of Otherness as a common tool of identity development. But in the context of Disruptive Otherness for ethnic minority children and adolescents, this otherwise normative process is complicated with imposition from others – in some cases, the direct communication that one is unwelcome in an environment.

Other messages that may impact identity development are those more specifically related to racialization. One participant noted that while he specifically identifies as Haitian, he is aware that many people see him as, “just Black.” Another participant self-identified as, “Asian, and Vietnamese,” acknowledging that many people assume he is Chinese, which bothers him enough to clarify his ethnic heritage when using a pan-ethnic label. While racialization is implied in many experiences of Disruptive Otherness, the specific effects of being racialized are impossible to understand, particularly in relation to overall identity development. Individual resilience, personality and temperament, and support systems may have great impacts on these experiences, and though they are out of the scope of the present study they are well worth further exploration.

Limitations

Despite these important contributions, multiple limitations need to be noted. Many of these limitations stem directly from the nature of the data used;

because this was secondary analysis, it was not possible to ask clarifying questions regarding participant identifications and recollections. Many participant experiences were not able to be categorized due to lack of clarity, and it is possible that further questioning would have resulted in better categorization and altered the results of the study.

Another limitation is the inability to determine how important the participants each considered their ethnic self-identification in relation to other forms of identification. Each participant was made aware of the study content before starting the interview section, which may have caused them to focus on their experiences of culture and discrimination more than usual. Given this, their ideas and comments may not have been representative of their experiences and identification as a whole.

Additionally, the high proportion of participants of East Asian heritage makes these results difficult to generalize. While each participant had his or her own unique experiences and reactions, many were still subject to similar stereotypes and assumptions from their peers based on assumed group membership. Despite attempts to increase diversity in the sample to allow us to make more broadly applicable claims, a number of participants in the initial data collection had to be subsequently excluded from the present study. It is because of this that the sample for the current study had a high proportion of East Asian participants, thus limiting the diversity in the sample.

Finally, one of the main limitations of the study is that participants may not have disclosed all relevant experiences they have had. This is a possibility for several reasons; first, participants may not have wanted to bring up topics or experiences that were uncomfortable for any reason, particularly with a stranger such as a researcher. Second, because the researcher was a stranger, some participants may not have been willing to disclose their more personal experiences, regardless of content. Finally, it is certainly understandable that participants may have had a desire to simply keep some of their experiences private, regardless of all other circumstances.

Implications for Future Research

In addition to the prior comments regarding further investigation into self-identification, there are multiple other directions future research may take from this study. As previously mentioned, Otherness appears to be a meaningful construct in relation to adolescents' identity labels and cultural affiliations. What this study cannot address is why these relations exist, and if a causal relation exists between these particular variables. Future research is necessary to explore Otherness in further depth, to determine how experiences that cause feelings of Otherness may relate to views on culture, race, identity, and other constructs that may be targeted for being different. Similar constructs may include romantic orientation, gender identity, ability status, social class (e.g. Morris, 2012), and other differences which may include visible markers.

Further research is also necessary to explore Bhatia's (2007) category of Generic Otherness. Given that it could not be assessed within the present study, considerations of research design and interview practices may need to be made in order to better understand what forms Generic Otherness may take, if it is at all felt within the ethnic minority population. More consideration also needs to be given to other minority populations, particularly given the over-representation of Asian ethnicities in this sample. It's quite possible that the nature of othering experiences may vary among different minority groups, with respect to different historical experiences.

Finally, it is critical to also consider the other constructs utilized in this study, cultural commitment, affiliation and comfort, and public regard. Cultural commitment, in particular, warrants further unpacking from its relations with Otherness and self-identification. The Navigating Across Cultures scale measures cultural commitment with questions about participants' beliefs in the values of their heritage culture and the American mainstream, their plans to raise children with values from each group, and how important the cultural values are to their lives. Further understanding of how ethnic minority adolescents identify with these values could be an integral part of understanding bicultural identity development.

Implications for Application

The sharing of powerful and deeply personal experiences is of great benefit to people who may believe such experiences do not take place.

Particularly in breaking barriers of White privilege, it is critical to listen to and understand personal narratives in order to effectively work with diverse populations. Studies such as this one not only provide the individual stories, they provide evidence of patterns to help support claims of shared experiences among groups. Many of the stories shared by participants in this study also point to the prevalence and nature of bullying toward ethnic minorities, indicating the need for better awareness and support from teachers, daycare providers, and other adults who may work with ethnic minority populations. While caution should always be exercised in assumptions of what any one individual may have experienced in his or her life, the present study does support the need for compassion, understanding, and acceptance of both personal experiences, and individual self-identification.

Another application can be implemented for both research protocols and programs where participants are asked to list their race or ethnicity. An apparently anomaly of the questionnaires associated with the Navigating Across Cultures, as opposed to other common forms participants were used to, was the open-ended nature of racial and ethnic self-identification. Several participants indicated they often identified with a Pan-ethnic label because there are no other options, especially as government forms do not typically include the ability to label oneself as, "American." Due to the apparent refreshing, and possibly empowering, nature of allowing participants to openly label themselves for this study, it may be of benefit to begin utilizing forms that request open self-labeling, rather than the more common checkboxes. While the multitude of labels that may be declared are

unlikely to be particularly convenient for analysis, the richness in the potential data collection as well as the positive nature of allowing individuals to define themselves as they wish seem well worth the inconveniences.

Conclusion

The present study explored the concept of being *othered* and the ways this may affect the experiences of ethnic minority youth. The results support the belief that Otherness is a construct which may categorically affect youth, each defined form of which may manifest in different ways. The Otherness experienced by participants in the present study was related to the way participants identified themselves in relation to their ethnic heritage, as well as how they rated their commitment to their heritage culture. Such self-identification was also related to their heritage culture commitment, as well as American culture commitment. The differing relations between Otherness, self-identification, and cultural commitment may indicate that Otherness and self-identification are each differently related to cultural commitment. Given this, further research is needed to more accurately determine causal directionality, as well as other ways experiencing Otherness may affect the lives of youth.

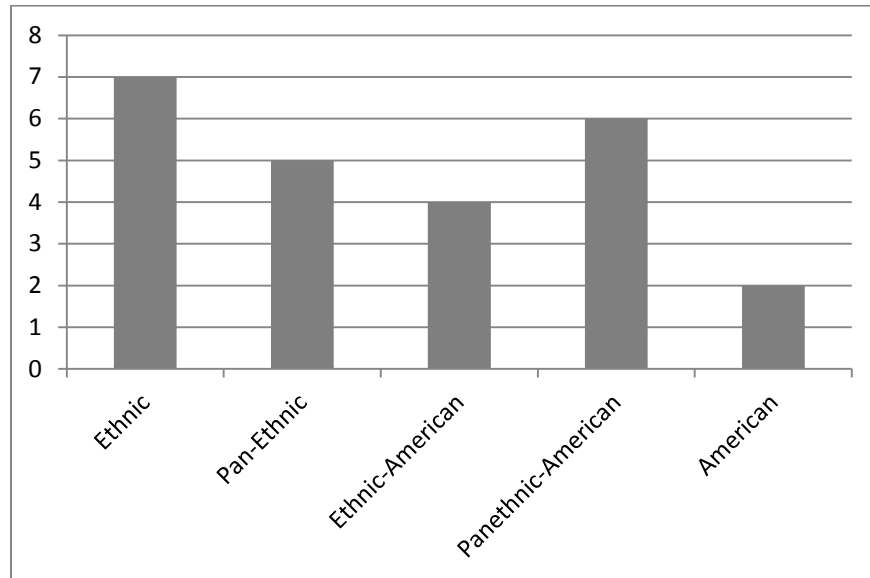
Appendix A: Figures

Figure 1. Distribution of self-identification labels among participants.

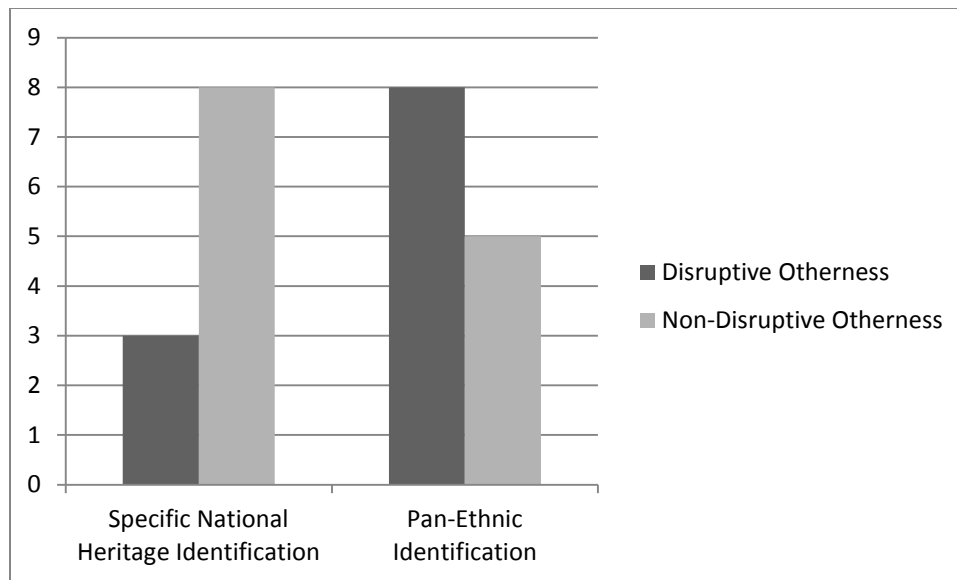


Figure 2. Differences between participant identification based on Disruptive or Non-Disruptive Otherness. A chi-square indicated statistically significant differences at the .10 level.

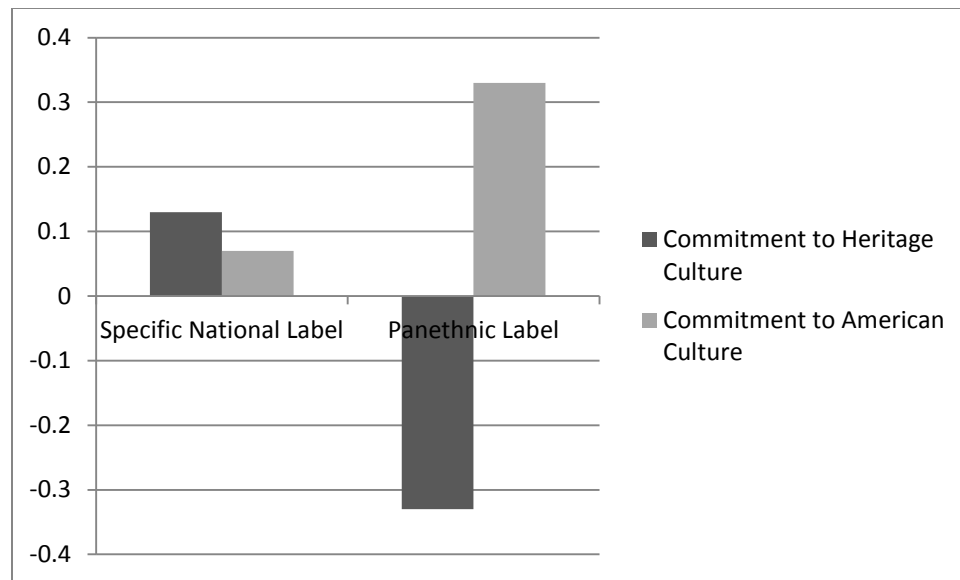


Figure 3. Differences in cultural commitment scores by self-identification label type. T-tests indicated statistically significant differences at the .10 level.

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