

# sparrs

INTERSECTIONS

ISSUE

9

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photo/JASMINE-WILDFLOWER OSMOND, ELENA CHOW, KEVIN HUYNH  
cover photo/JASMINE-WILDFLOWER OSMOND, ELENA CHOW, KEVIN HUYNH

# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

*Dear reader,*

Sometimes, I fear that in the name of promoting cultural diversity and Asian American awareness, our community fails to do just that. Rather than sharing our culture with others, we host events and programs in the name of diversity, but promote it only amongst those who look and act like us.

While there is a time for intimate spaces just to call our own, this semester's magazine, *Intersections*, is not about those times. This issue is about transgressing boundaries to understand another group and the beauty that can come when we do.

From writing about transracial adoptions, to people with disabilities, to the Black Lives Matters movement, we hope to provide insight into fellow Asian Americans' experiences with communities that are too often neglected.

My hope is that in reading this issue, you'll not only appreciate the work of those who sought out a sense of belonging in other communities, but also gain your own sense of appreciation for a culture or experience that isn't your own.

I welcome you to join us in celebrating diversity through reading this semester's articles.

Know that as you flip through these pages, it doesn't matter who you are or where you've come from, this issue is also for you.

**SINCERELY,  
CRESONIA HSIEH  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**



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# KULTURA CULTURA

## *Filipino American identity and Spanish influences*

**BY RIKKI OCAMPOS**

There's a controversial saying that goes, "Filipinos are the Mexicans of Asia."

After 300 years of Spanish occupation, Filipino culture is heavily influenced by Spanish culture. This sheer influence is exemplified in the Filipino language (Tagalog) and food. For example, nearly 30 percent of Tagalog is made up of Spanish-based words and dishes like "arroz caldo," "flan" and "tortas," according to The Real Instituto Elcano's official website.

Some Filipino Americans have taken this Spanish influence and identified as Hispanic, similar to how certain Latin Americans identify as Hispanic due to their respective Spanish influence.

Jeff Mirafior, a Filipino American University of Central Florida engineering junior, used to mark "Hispanic" on his forms in high school. He has since started identifying as Asian, but at the time, choosing to identify as Hispanic allowed him to connect with the many of the Hispanic friends he had then.

"I could relate to them on things we eat and words we use to speak," Mirafior said.

The decision to label himself as something other than Asian was also based on the fact that he grew up in the southeastern area of the United States, where Hispanics are the second largest minority after blacks.

"It's just easy to relate to those who are somewhat the majority of the minority," he said.

Theresa Sanchez, a UCF studio art senior, said she gets the best of both worlds.

Being that Sanchez's mother is Filipina and her father is Mexican American, Sanchez said this lets her experience firsthand just how remarkably similar both cultures are in regards to food and language.

"People say that Filipinos are the Mexicans of the Asian world, and since I'm half Mexican, half Filipino, I joke that wouldn't that make me full Mexican," Sanchez said.

Interestingly, when Sanchez makes that joke to other Filipino Americans, they don't always respond with an agreement on being Mexican or Hispanic.

Professor Christian Ravela, a UCF assistant professor of humanities and cultural studies, moved to California from the Philippines with his family at four years old. He grew up believing that Filipinos were Asian due to the country's geographical location and own identification.

Despite having never identified as Hispanic, Ravela sees how some Filipinos may come to that assumption.

"I can understand a kind of kinship to a type of Latino culture in the way of being a combination of indigenous and European influences," he said.

With both Hispanic and Filipino cultures experiencing a mix of influences from the indigenous population and colonization from the same European country, it's understandable to see the shared identification Filipino Americans may create.

Both Mirafior and Sanchez have had the experience of others assuming them to be full Hispanic due to their names. However, in Ravela's case, it was the color of skin that led to that assumption.

"I think, for me, it was mainly how I looked based on my brownness - that was a kind of racial signifier for people," Ravela said.

Despite the Philippines' similarity to Spanish culture, Spain isn't the only one to have a great influence on the Filipino culture. Chinese, Muslim and indigenous civilizations have also made their marks.

According to a study by Ateneo de Manila University titled "The Archaeological Record of Chinese Influences in the Philippines," Chinese-Filipino relations began sometime in the 10th century and as a result, Chinese dishes and loan words have been part of Filipino culture longer than the Spanish counterpart.

In contrast to the predominant Catholicism and Christianity amongst Filipinos, many Filipinos from the Mindanao region in the southern portion of the Philippines are Muslim and have little to no Spanish influence.

Mirafior said he believes that labeling Filipinos as Hispanics erases other cultures because Filipino culture is a result of other cultures coming together to make one. But in whatever way a Filipino American chooses to identify, Mirafior suggests to just respect the different aspects of Filipino values and traditions. There are Spanish, Islamic and Chinese influences. The culmination of these creates the Filipino culture which is a unique identity itself.

"I think it's up to the person to eventually find out what their culture really is. And that's why when I was younger, I used to identify as Hispanic because that's what I could relate to," Mirafior said. "I feel like that eventually you come to a realization that Filipino culture is very unique and it should be separate. You see it as its own entity and its own culture."

Black and white criss-cross top (\$23) and black pleated gaucho pants (\$42). Available at Henri Girl Boutique.  
Stylist: Kevin Huynh.



all photos/RACHEL HE

## DE-CYPHERING HIP-HOPPERS

*Contributing to the hip-hop culture*

**BY NORMAN GALANG**

Songs about pain, depression and happiness relate to everyone, proving that art is a reflection of life. Hip-hop is widely perceived as an outlet to express these emotions, with songs commenting on the struggles and joys of life.

The culture was created by black and Latino inner-city youth trying to express themselves artistically by speaking on discrimination and the harsh conditions that plagued the South Bronx in the 1970s, according to Ibram X. Kendi, a University of Florida professor, who will teach a history of hip-hop course in Spring 2016.

Over 40 years later, hip-hop is one of

the most influential genres of music, from emceeing, D.J.ing, fashion, dance and street art to everyday slang. Luis Caraballo-Burgos, a former UF professor who developed and instructed the course *Sociology and Race in Hip-Hop*, said that it's hard to ignore the mass influence that hip-hop has sparked, especially in the Asian American community.

A Filipino American producer, !llmind, made beats for rap stars such as Drake, Kanye West and J. Cole. Dumbfoundead is a widely respected Korean American battle emcee. MC Jin is a Chinese American rapper who once signed a major record deal with Ruff Ryders and starred in the

blockbuster cult-classic “2 Fast 2 Furious.” Tyga is a half Vietnamese and Jamaican artist who has made massive club hits such as “Rack City” and “Faded” featuring Lil Wayne, and signed Cambodian rapper Honey Cocaine.

Asian Americans have not only made a dent in rap music, but have solidified themselves in fashion as well.

Famous streetwear line Crooks & Castles, worn by the likes of Jay Z, 50 Cent and French Montana was created by Filipino friends Dennis Calvero and Emil Soriano.

A Bathing Ape, which is responsible for hipsters’ favorite camo-printed jackets, was created by a Japanese D.J. named Nigo, and has been made popular by artists such as Pharrell Williams and A\$AP Rocky. It’s difficult to find a music video without one of their clothing items being donned by a famous rap figure.

The most notable Asian hip-hoppers are the Jabbawockeez. Donning coke-white masks and gloves, the predominantly Filipino American clique made their fame on MTV’s “America’s Best Dance Crew” and are responsible for shining light on the dance element of the culture -- a core of the hip-hop Asian American community.

Ryan Finley, a 22-year-old avid dancer at UF, said that without hip-hop, Asian American students wouldn’t be as tight-knit as they are now.

“Dancing is like glue for everyone,” Finley said. “It helps bond our community.”

He said hip-hop has not only unified people of Asian descent, but has made him a better individual overall. During his late teens, there were many times when he would practice break-dancing instead of partying. Staying on his craft taught him discipline, progression and values that he wouldn’t have learned if he was never introduced to dance.

Finley’s passion led him to apply to UF after finding out there were multiple hip-hop dance groups on campus. He graduated with his bachelor’s in sociology



and is currently getting his master’s in management.

“I don’t know what I would be doing without hip-hop,” Finley said. “Probably living a more sheltered life -- not developing myself more as an individual.”

Others shared this sentiment.

John Ferrer, a UF health science major and vice president of Apocalypse Dance Crew, said dancing not only made him more confident about expressing himself but also helped him get closer with his friends and expand his social circle.

He heard that before his time at UF, Asian American organizations weren’t as close with each other, and believes that dancing helped more students come together. During a workshop held by the Filipino Student Association, he saw active members from all different Asian American sub-organizations and realized how important dancing is to not only him, but UF in general.

“Being able to share the art with people is rewarding,” Ferrer said. “If I can make people happy by dancing with them or for them, that’s what makes me happy.”

For some Asian Americans, falling in love with hip-hop kept them away from bad environments that would have potentially endangered their future.

Yoshiya Kushibiki, a UF geology major, dance minor and president of The Hip Hop Collective, said gaining friends who shared the same love for hip-hop helped build a brotherhood-like rapport with fellow dancers who went out of their way to help him.

He grew up in a gang-ridden area of Orlando, Florida, and getting into dance prevented him from dabbling in dangerous situations.

“If it wasn’t for some people who I met at hip-hop events, I would have walked my ass into a whole bunch of gangs, and Lord knows what would have happened,” Kushibiki said.

Out of all the elements of hip-hop, the Asian youth for the most part, tend to participate in the dance aspect of the culture. Kushibiki explained that dancing is simply more accessible. With graffiti, you constantly have to buy more spray paint to improve, and if you want to D.J., you have to buy expensive equipment.

“With dancing, you just get a pair of shoes, literally, and YouTube videos,” Kushibiki said. Growing up in a single-parent

“I don’t know what I would be doing without hip-hop.”



Mesh crop top (\$27) and black zipper-front pants (\$55). Available at Henri Girl Boutique.

Model: Mia Zhu. Groups: Apocalypse and Hip Hop Collective. Stylist: Kevin Huynh. Fashion Assistant: Joey Gonzalez.

household, he was only able to work with what was at his disposal.

A lot of Asian Americans seem to be in love with the music, simply because they're able to relate to the resistance that is often preached by rap artists.

Carballo-Burgos said that rap music gives the Asian Americans youth an outlet to find a sense of self while sharing their pain.

"It is struggle music," that people relate to, he said. "In particular, [to] our Filipino brothers and sisters because of all the experience with colonialism."

Asian Americans' love for hip-hop is strong, and it can be easy for them to identify with other minorities' struggles. However

most prefer to step into a cypher (people dancing in a circle) than step up to the mic.

Although there are a few Asian American emcees who get flashes of spotlight, none has broken into the mainstream and shined long enough to make a lasting mark.

There is simply too much pressure when being a rapper, Carballo-Burgos said. If Iggy Azalea was a dope DJ, or breakdancer, no one would question her authenticity or appreciation for the culture. If Eminem was just a graffiti writer, no one would bring up the fact that he's a white male appropriating a culture.

But the concept of cultural appropriation isn't exclusively for white artists.

Korean rapper Keith Ape put out a viral song titled "It G Ma" which was based on Atlanta rapper OG Maco's hit-anthem "U Gussed It." Maco claimed that whether Ape realizes it or not, the Asian artist was mocking black stereotypes by wearing heavy jackets and gold grills in their music video, when Maco's version did not show any of these items.

Although the purpose is up for interpretation, Carballo-Burgos said it's difficult to prove someone's intentions. Regardless if Ape's aesthetic was for visual appeal or to make profit, there's still a certain level of appreciation in order to pay homage to OG Maco.

Not all black artists feel the same strong sentiment about cultural appropriation. Bunduki Ramadan, aka Hip

Hop Duke, is an underground Sudanese American rapper from Jacksonville, Florida, who admires other races participating in hip-hop and believes Asian "b-boys" or breakdancers show real appreciation for the art.

"Hip-hop has no color," he said. "[Asians] hold up the culture to its true values. I got respect for that."

"It's always beautiful when you can share your culture with somebody else," Ramadan said. "Asians go hard."

While hip-hop has its origins in the black and hispanic community, the culture is so big that it now belongs to the world, no longer occupying a single racial space. Finley, Ferrer and Kushibiki are proving that, one dance step at a time.



all photos/CRESONIA HSIEH

# TOP MODEL

*How being the “model minority” creates disconnect*

**BY PATRICIA QUINTERO**

The stereotype of Asian Americans being a large, homogenous group of high achievers may appear as flattering, but in reality it's a curse -- not only for Asian Americans, but for other minorities as well.

This “high-achieving” stereotype is often called the model minority myth. Some say this archetype distances Asian Americans from other minorities by grouping a diverse conglomeration of people and expecting them to all be the same. This type of mentality creates competition and threatens unity between Asian American groups.

For other non-Asian minorities, the myth places harm by sending the message that Asians are the minority to emulate, creating disunity and tension between both groups within the Asian American community and fellow minorities as well.

“This myth has now become a stereotype for Asian Americans that enables a kind of division across different people of color,” said Christian Ravela, a University of

Central Florida humanities and cultural studies assistant professor

Ravela has not only experienced the model minority myth firsthand but has also studied it in length. He said he feels the model minority myth creates a barrier between Asian Americans and other minorities.

*“I feel guilty because other ethnicities are given a hard time, especially on petty things like where you grew up...”*

things like where you grew up or where you got your education. But no matter where an Asian goes they're considered the best over everyone else,” he said.

For UCF restaurant management freshman Nina Melendez, stereotypes have a negative connotation for her as a Latina.

“Stereotypes are wrong, no matter how you look at them. But I'd rather be called smart

UCF nursing junior, Brandon Vanpham said he recognizes the advantages he has as an Asian American and sees how he can be seen differently than other minorities.

“I feel guilty because other ethnicities are given a hard time, especially on petty

than a ‘hotheaded Latina,’” she said.

Pedro Beniquez, a sophomore studying art at UCF, said he feels that success within Hispanic culture is comprised of the happiness and well-being of one's family.

“Success to Hispanic Americans is just having a happy family, that's what is most important,” he said. “My parents basically fit the mold of model immigrants in the sense that they are upper middle class. If they were Asian, we'd fit right into the model minority.”

For Ayla Arshad however, the seemingly positive connotations that follow her as an Asian American cause their own set of problems.

Arshad said she was taught to keep a successful reputation when she came to the U.S., but as she got older, the UCF psychology senior said she realized that the Asian American reputation of being smart could turn discouraging just as quickly.

“As time goes on, you're in competition with all the people around you,” she said. “If you ever fall short of what is expected of you, then you just feel worse because you were supposed to be able to do this.”



# SHRINGAAR

## *Using social media to take back the bindi*

**BY ANUPA KOTIPOYINA**

Bindis have become the epicenter of the cultural appreciation versus cultural appropriation debate. Colorful adornments traditionally worn on the forehead by Hindu women, bindis have been an important part of several South and Southeast Asian religious and cultural traditions for millennia.

But, it has been at music festivals in America's heartland such as the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival that bindis have become mainstream in American media because of their use by celebrities such as Kendall Jenner, Selena Gomez and Iggy Azalea.

That spotlight is unwanted for some.

Anjana Raj, a 26-year-old Indian American based in Chicago, started a fashion blog called Bangle Banger for the South Asian diaspora in March 2014 as a place for her to share her style inspired by the blending of Indian and American identities. The blog soon became a way for her to take a stand on social justice issues.

While she had noticed that "Asian-inspired" fashion was becoming increasingly popular, it was the use of the bindi at Coachella that

came across as a serious offense. In April, she posted a photo of herself wearing a bindi with the words "Reclaim the Bindi" and the caption "in lieu of Coachella."

Her post was seen by another blogger (who chose to stay anonymous to stave off internet harassment) who thought the phrase could be taken even further.

"Why not take that phrase and make it a bigger thing that South Asians could connect with?" the blogger said.

The anonymous blogger created her website "Reclaim the Bindi" as a space to bring awareness to cultural appropriation, and to encourage South Asians to post photos on the blog and other social media platforms of them wearing a bindi with the hashtag #ReclaimTheBindi. On Instagram alone, a search for the hashtag yields thousands of pictures of South Asian women wearing bindis.

That sort of pride in her heritage is not something that the founder always felt. She described feeling uncomfortable going to the grocery store as a child right after temple, dressed in traditional clothing.

"Growing up, it was kind of difficult in the sense that I did feel culturally suppressed," she said. "When I started paying more

attention to how cultural appropriation is occurring, I start(ed) thinking about the fact that people who are outside my culture are able to misuse it. But why am I not even able to feel comfortable partaking in it myself?"

Raj also said she sees the irony of people from other cultures wearing the bindi.

"When I was growing up, anything that was different, people made fun of," Raj said. "And now it's these same people who grow up and want to be part of the culture, and I don't think that's appropriate."

She pointed out that people of South Asian descent went through a lot of discrimination in the U.S., especially after 9/11, when they were racially profiled and targets of violence.

Even before the events of 9/11, South Asians experienced violent discrimination. In the 1980s, a gang called the "Dotbusters" subjected Indian Americans living in the New Jersey area to hate crimes -- simply for being Indian. In July 1987, the group published a letter in the Jersey Journal detailing their personal prejudice against South Asians.

"We will go to any extreme to get Indians to move out of Jersey City," the letter read. The gang looked through phone books to find Indian-sounding last names to find

*“It’s inappropriate for people to put on their culture for all of the good parts and not have any kind of negative connotation for any of the bad stuff.”*

Ivory side lace-up midi dress (\$45).  
Stylist: Kevin Huynh.  
Makeup Artist: Tisha Barlow.  
Model: Shaina Panchel.  
Fashion Assistant: Joey Gonzalez.  
Available at Henri Girl Boutique.

individuals to target.

South Asians in the New York City and New Jersey area feared wearing traditional clothes or donning the bindi for fear of being attacked, according to a New York Times article. “Dothead” is still used as a racial slur against South Asians.

“It’s inappropriate for people to put on their culture for all of the good parts and not have any kind of negative connotation for any of the bad stuff,” Raj said. “When you don on a ‘costume’, it’s almost like devaluing it. To them it’s nothing. And it means so much to us, and I think the bindi especially -- it’s what gives an Indian woman her identity. To have everyone put that on like it’s an accessory is just insulting.”

However, Raj said that appropriation is a really complex issue.

“It’s not really black and white,” she said. “It’s so dependent on how you grew up and what’s okay for you. For me, I just don’t think it’s right.”

Krishna Naik, a sophomore double major in sociology and nutritional sciences at the University of Florida, agreed that the deep cultural and religious significance of the bindi makes it something that people want to protect, but the issue is not so simple.

“Wearing a bindi without the knowledge of its value can be degrading,” Naik said. “However, the topic of the appropriation of

the bindi is also hypocritical at times because many people in the Indian community also wear the bindi solely as an aesthetic.”

Even in contemporary Indian media, celebrities and fashion icons wear bindis purely as fashion statements, outside of their religious context. What in antiquity was a single red dot -- traditionally a powder applied in a simple circle as a symbol of piety -- is now mass produced and cheaply sold in a variety of shapes, colors and styles as an easy-to-apply sticker.

She also noted that older generations do not seem as concerned with appropriation of the bindi.

“I feel as though older generations, like my parents and grandparents, see it in a more positive light,” Naik said. “They once struggled to immigrate and mesh into a new culture here in America and the use of the bindi in media and today’s culture can be taken as a sign that our culture is accepted and celebrated in a foreign land.”

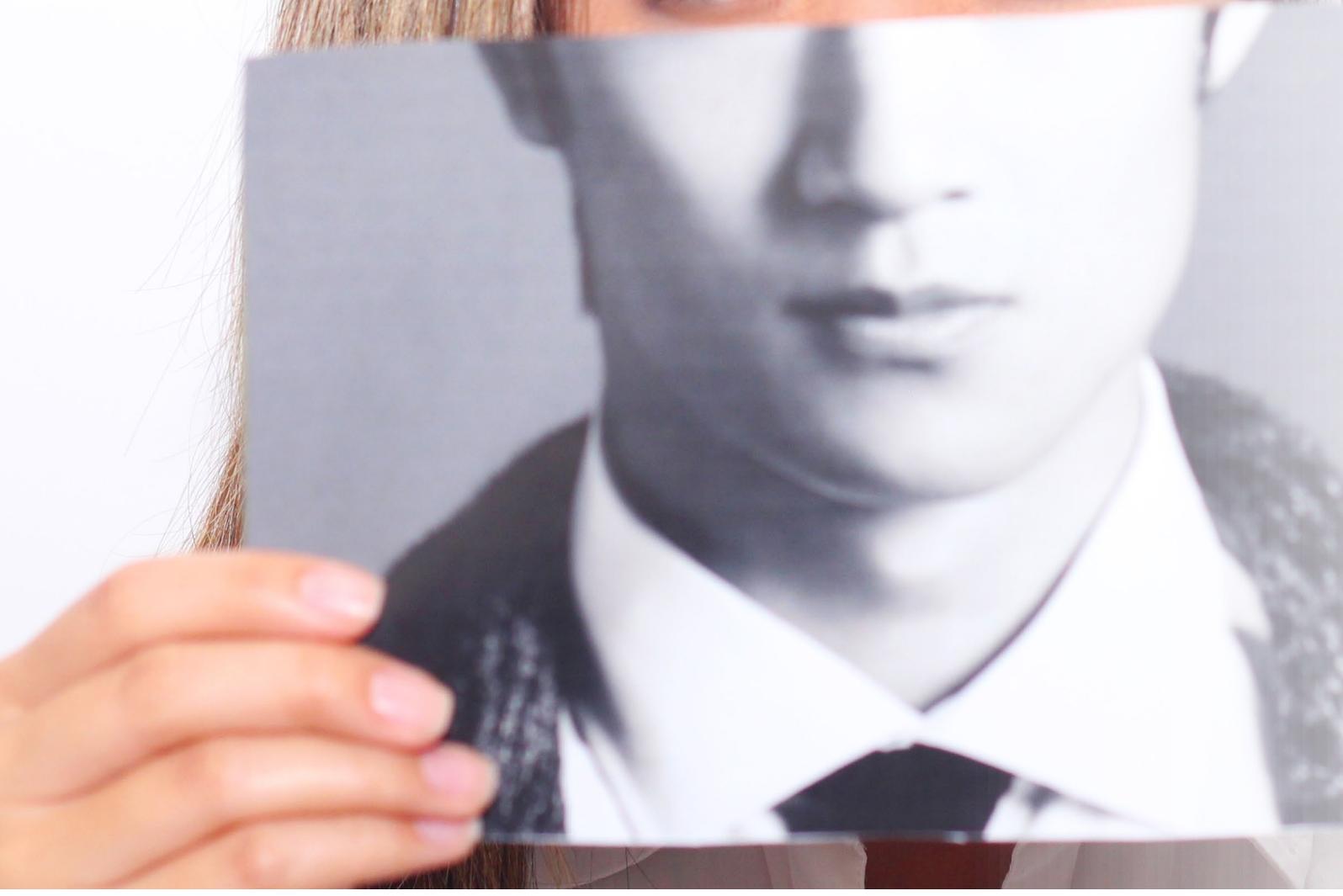
Raj also sees differing attitudes between her generation and her parents’.

“They never wanted to rock the boat -- they never wanted to jeopardize their position here,” Raj said. “But my generation, when we grow up, we hold just as much presence here as anyone else, and we deserve to mold what this country means to us and what we mean to it.”



**THE MAN**

**TH**



N IN

# E MIRROR

## Reflections on being transgender in the Asian American community

BY ALEXANDRIA NG

While other little girls played dress up and pretended to be the Powerpuff Girls, Manpreet Sekhon, at 7 years old, longed to be like Goten, a male character in one of his favorite television shows, Dragon Ball Z.

One night, upon seeing a shooting star, Sekhon wished that he would become a boy. Much to his disappointment, it did not come true the next morning, but it did trigger the process for his transition from female to male.

Sekhon is a 20-year-old transgender male majoring in computer science and engineering at Chabot College in Hayward, California.

“It was pretty easy for me to come out, but I had to build up to it because of my religion and culture,” Sekhon said. “That was my biggest obstacle with coming out. It wasn’t my family making it difficult for me to transition. It was mostly society, so I’m just glad I have the support of my family.”

His family had a very close bond. His mom raised him and his three other siblings to always stick together no matter what and to always pursue their dreams. She always had suspicions that Sekhon had an interest in other girls and confronted him about it at the age of 12, though at the time, she only thought Manpreet was lesbian.

Sparks reached out to Sekhon’s mother; however, she was not available for comment.

Coming from a North Indian Sikh background, Sekhon said that most of his pressures came from a culture where people of the LGBT community would be killed if they couldn’t change their ways.

“They’ll tell you to pray. Just pray it away,” Sekhon said. “But if you can’t change, you’re killed. They don’t see it as how you love differently or how you identify yourself differently. They see it as a type of cancerous thing.”

No matter how much Sekhon tried to push away these feelings though, he could not, and eventually came out to his fellow high school classmates as bisexual. Sekhon thought that as long as he still identified as female, he would not stray too far away from the norm, but he soon realized that he was a man.

The same day he came to terms with his masculinity, his mother called his doctor to have him put on testosterone. In July of his sophomore year in college, he finally got to cut his hair and dress how he wanted to.

“If I didn’t have [my family’s] support, I don’t think I would’ve come out,” Sekhon said. “You need a foundation because when you feel alone, and there will be so many times you feel that way, especially in the world we live in, having someone who’s physically there and will listen to you and be there for you in those hard times really means something.”

Although Sekhon’s family accepted his new identity, Sekhon thought his culture was staunchly against him because of a long history where traditions caused people to fear change. He believed that the Asian American community in particular was the biggest opposer to the LGBT community since they were not well represented in the public eye.

“All you see is Caitlyn Jenner and it’s just really hard, especially for people of color,” Sekhon said. “We can’t relate to a rich, white famous woman. We need somebody we can relate to so we know how to come out to our parents or to society and how to handle it. We need that support and I feel like that isn’t covered with most of the people who are out there representing us. I don’t really even know any other Asian transgender people because everyone’s scared to come out, so it must be the culture and traditions.”

*“All you see is Caitlyn Jenner and it’s just really hard, especially for people of color.”*

Although Sekhon said he frequently feels alone when dealing with body dysphoria and others’ transphobia, he aims to reach out to others who are still closeted in the Asian American LGBT community through

social media platforms and involvement in local Sikh temples. With a desire to push for change, Sekhon claims that it only takes one person and a group of supporters to educate the general public about the transgender community, as well as an increase of Asian American leaders who will provide a voice advocating for LGBT members.

“Nobody said it was going to be easy, but the reason why I keep going is because a lot of people say that transitioning is going to be difficult,” Sekhon said. “I want to be at the end and say I did it; this is my experience and this is what happened. I want to finish what I started.”

\*UF APIA Affairs, UF QAPI, seven UF experts and an Ontario College of Art and Design professor were asked for their opinion on the subject. They either did not reply or could not provide input.

# STROLLING TO THE SAME BEAT

*Asian American Greek life's origins in black Greek traditions*



## BY ALEXANDRIA NG

They step. They stroll, and their jackets bear their nicknames and line numbers.

These aren't members of historically black organizations.

These are the members of the Multicultural Greek Council (MGC), an organization that now encompasses Asian American sororities and fraternities. MGC was based off of the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) which is composed of historically black organizations.

MGC is not affiliated with the NPHC, but its roots stem from them. They both encourage specific pillars of excellence, service and brotherhood or sisterhood

in their communities, wear Greek letters and line jackets and use the call signs associated with each sorority or fraternity as a way of identification.

A similarity between Asian American and black organizations is the way they induct new members, a process known as the probate period which originated in the 1970s, when black students' involvement in Greek life was just developing.

During initiation, new members were required to go through a probationary pledging phase where restrictions, such as not being allowed to walk in public places, were put on them. They were to stay silent to the outside world as they went through the rituals of this secret initiation process.

At the end of the initiation, new sisters

and brothers were to emerge as new people with new perspectives, proud to have gone through initiation and confident in their membership through knowledge of the organization that only true members would know.

"Discretion is key and we like to keep our history and our rituals to our members," said T'Tné Cummings, a University of Florida nursing senior and president of the UF chapter of the historically black sorority Zeta Phi Beta. "You know you're a member when you find out why we do the things that we do. When you first come in, you're unsure of why we do certain things, or about our history. But during the process, you learn and that's when you build your sisterhood or brotherhood."

Asian American organizations also use discretionary induction ceremonies,



photo/ABSINTHE WU

using the term “probate” to refer to the vow of secrecy that students take during the process of entering a multicultural sorority or fraternity.

Another tradition that stems from black Greek organizations is the art of movement and expression, also known as stepping and strolling.

In the days of slavery, movement, dancing and singing provided a way for African Americans to express themselves. The rhythms and beats of step reflect a long history of struggles and victories within the black community.

Despite its African American origins, step has been widely adopted

by Asian American sororities and fraternities to tell stories of their own cultures and identities. Although the tradition of step carries significant historical value to the black community, the sense of camaraderie between the two cultures prevents a negative sense of cultural appropriation, which seems to be a rising issue in recent times.

“Asian American organizations have the right to do it as well if that’s how they want to express themselves,” Cummings said. “Even though their traditions originate from NPHC, they take what we’ve done and put their own twist to it, which is what I like about the MGC. They combine it with their heritage and their culture to make it something new.”

Most Asian American groups also feel that adopting stepping and strolling into their traditions is not a way of stealing other cultures, but a way of recognizing what they had to go through in order to make present-day possibilities a reality.

“We always show respect for the NPHC in all we do,” said Michael Fronda, a chemical engineering senior and president of the UF Multicultural Greek Council. “They came before us and we know that they paved the way so we always try to pay homage to them. If it weren’t for them, we wouldn’t have these opportunities that we do have as multicultural organizations and we make sure to teach our new members

*“(They)...came before us and we know that they paved the way so we always try to pay homage to them. If it weren’t for them, we wouldn’t have these opportunities that we do have as multicultural organizations...”*

why we step and the importance of its history.”

As part of similar culture-based institutions, members of the NPHC and MGC find more parallels in

their communities than they do differences. Acknowledging that as minority groups they face issues of discrimination and a history of unequal rights, both Asian American and African American students recognize how significant unity is when taking on adversity.

“When you’re trying to solve a problem, your voice isn’t as loud when you’re by yourself,” said Nick Brown, fourth-year mechanical and aerospace engineering major and president of UF’s chapter of Pi Delta Psi. “When more people voice the same opinion, things are bound to change. That’s why I think that when there’s more people going for a common goal, chances of it being beneficial to them is a lot higher.”

The Asian American organizations of the MGC strive to come together to cross cultural boundaries and develop their own trademark traditions and identities as their organizations expand. They hope to expand on others’ customs, while paying them their due respect.

“To be part of a group to express their culture with people who don’t necessarily have heritage in that culture is an opportunity to share some cultural experiences and to teach those outside of the organization,” said Jack Causseaux, Director of Sorority and Fraternity Affairs and UF’s MGC’s advisor.

No matter their history, place of origin, or method of being carried out, each tradition from both black and Asian heritage holds special meaning to their respective communities. As these values are passed down from generation to generation and are altered, assimilated and renewed, they will always carry a story connecting one to their ancestral roots.

# EMPRESS RISING

*A look at Danny Nguyen's Spring  
2016 collection*

**STYLED BY KEVIN HUYNH  
PHOTOS BY JASMINE-WILDFLOWER OSMOND**

**H**ouston-based designer Danny Nguyen, from Danny Nguyen Couture, graciously loaned gowns from his Spring 2016 collection for Sparks' first fashion spread.

DNC specializes in custom-designed apparel, weddings and alterations for celebrity clients including Jeannie Mai and Amanda Lepore. Nguyen is known for taking motifs familiar with Asian dresses such as the Ao Dai and Qipao and giving them a sultry, modern Hollywood twist fit for any screen siren -- think floral appliques, metallic sequins and silk capes.

Nguyen got his start in fashion at an early age, acting

as an apprentice to his mother in her tailor shop. They moved to the U.S. from Vietnam when he was 4 years old and after years of failed starts, he successfully launched DNC.

Nguyen said he designs his collections to have a cohesive theme, but likes each outfit to be like a character in a movie, which was our inspiration. Shot in the Asian rock garden in the Coffin Asian Art wing of the Harn Museum of Art, we wanted to showcase gowns that were worthy enough to attend the Hollywood premiere of "The Hunger Games" but also look as if they were borrowed from Zhang Yimou's "Curse of the Golden Flower."

Collection by Danny Nguyen Couture.  
Model: Stephanie Wong.  
Makeup: Eunice Jin.  
Stylist: Kevin Huynh.  
Fashion assistant: Joey Gonzalez.

A woman with dark hair pulled back is standing outdoors in a lush, green environment. She is wearing a long, flowing lavender gown with a matching silk cape. The gown is intricately detailed with turquoise floral applique and silver sequins. She has her hands on her hips and is looking towards the camera. In the background, there is a waterfall cascading over rocks, surrounded by dense foliage and trees. The lighting is bright and natural, suggesting a sunny day.

Lavender silk-cape gown with turquoise floral and silver sequin applique (\$2,200).



Victorian lace gown with black floral applique and pink tulle underskirt (\$1,400).





Crimson and gold-sequined gown with black floral applique and tulle skirt (\$3,000).



Emerald gown with sequined black floral applique and royal blue silk cape (\$1,600).



# ONE OF

*Including people with disabilities*

**BY NICOLE DAN**

**M**att Wilson considers himself an adrenaline junkie -- he rock climbs, rides Jet Skis and even sky dives. Despite his participation in extreme sports, many consider his most impressive accomplishment to be putting on his two prosthetic legs.

“To me, that’s just a normal thing, ‘cause that’s what I have to do in order to survive and live,” Wilson said.

Wilson, a 20-year-old University of Florida history major, was born with the VATER association, which is the combination of physiological symptoms including cardiac defects and kidney anomalies. However, his most visible disability was that he was born without his right leg and that his left leg was amputated because it had a clubfoot.

Before being adopted by his American family, Wilson lived in Taiwan for 10 years and witnessed the stigma that came with his disability. Wilson said he believes that he was put up for adoption because of it.



"I've proven them wrong with my work ethic," he said.

Wilson now considers his adopted family to be his only family, and is not currently interested in reconnecting with his family in Taiwan. His family has taught him to be independent by teaching him to cook, do laundry and budget. This independence has driven him to aspire to be a contract lawyer in a major city.

For 23-year-old Bryn Mawr alumnus Esther Chiang it's not her able-bodied family, but her developmentally disabled older brother who taught her about the world.

Chiang's brother, Nathan Chiang, has Down syndrome and is also partially deaf. His intellectual disability caused him to be discriminated against by other Asians due to cultural stigma, Chiang said. When her family goes out in public, she said other Asians often look down on her family because of her brother's disability.

"They don't go out of their way to love and accept him, and they don't see him as human," she said.

Chiang said that the model minority myth is to blame, because it hides problems in the Asian American community and prevents them from accessing resources.

Especially given language barriers.

"I think the model minority myth is so detrimental to the disability community because it implies that we're always OK all the time."

According to Chiang, when her brother was born, her mom was given pamphlets that were only in English,

*"I think the model minority myth is so detrimental to the disability community because it implies that we're always OK all the time."*

which meant that her mother and brother had to fly back to Taiwan to learn about what Down syndrome was. But Chiang knows that if they lived in Taiwan, getting any kind of help would be out of the question.

"They would never be able to take my brother to Taiwan because there's no government resources supporting that," Chiang said. "There's no cultural understanding about what it means to have a disability."

Having a sibling with a disability influenced the way that Chiang was brought up.

Chiang said her parents did not hold her and her brother to the same academic standards because they felt that it wouldn't be fair. But, she said that other people may have had the opposite experience, where they had heightened

pressure due to their sibling's disability.

"There's a lot of like, hurt, and pain that a lot of siblings don't talk about a lot."

"I wish I could have said to them, like 'I'm sad, I'm sad that these things happened, and I'm sad about a lot of things that happened in my life that I wasn't able to mourn because I had to be strong,'" she said.

Dr. Peter Wong, research director at Asian and Pacific Islanders with Disabilities of California (APIDC), said that families are an important support system, especially for immigrants.

Wong has researched how Asian Pacific Islander Americans (APIAs) with disabilities struggle within the U.S. to gain jobs and access resources and found that APIAs with disabilities in California had an employment rate of 27.4 percent, a rate lower than Hispanics with disabilities (38.2 percent) or African Americans with disabilities (31.7 percent).

"Individuals with disabilities are not looked at as someone who could be productive," Wong said.

Wong has noticed over the years, that data on Asian Americans with disabilities is sparse and they are considered a hard-to-reach population. As a result, there is little research done about them and few programs available to them specifically.

For those who are unable to be independent, the U.S. government does provide resources, but often, APIAs cannot access them either because of language or cultural barriers, much like the Chiang family's experience. Chiang also acknowledges this importance and has started a project called Reimagine Ability, in order to create a community of people who have disabilities, or are family members or friends of people who have disabilities, especially for those from cultures that might not be disability-friendly.

The site's mission is to reimagine what ability can look like, which also means acknowledging mental illness as a component of ability, and to examine the relationship between culture, religion and disability. Chiang wanted to see if the acceptance brought on by her parents' Christianity also happened in other religions.

"My parents would never have accepted my brother unless they were Christian," Chiang said. "I think one of the biggest reasons they wanted to love my brother and really see him as human and treat him really well was because of their relationship with God."

Chiang acknowledges the huge influence her brother has had on her life, and she wants others to find the humanity in her brother.

"He deserves love like any other person," Chiang said. "In some ways it's so basic -- but so radical."



# FINDING YOUR ROOTS

*Adoptees delve into their cultural origins*

## BY BRITTANY CHEN

While most children learn about their culture and heritage from family members, Katie Soo is an exception. She learned hers from history books.

The University of Central Florida sports and exercise science sophomore was adopted from Seoul, South Korea at six months old by a white family in Michigan.

Because there was limited knowledge of her birth mother and father, her adoptive parents taught her about her native culture through history books.

Soo's adoption is a case of what some would call transracial adoption, according to Shelley Park, a UCF associate professor and expert in transracial adoption.

Transracial adoption is set apart from same-race adoptions in that it invokes issues of racial and ethnic identity and refers to the adoption of a child of one racial or ethnic group by adoptive parents of another racial or ethnic group. In most cases, it's white parents who adopt children out of their race.

Although Park studies and focuses on transracial in her research, she also has personal experience.

Park, who is white, adopted a daughter of Guyanese descent.

According to the professor, there are different ways to raise a child that has been adopted into a family of a different race. The child could be raised "color-blind," meaning the race is disregarded in an attempt to make the assimilation process easier, or they could be taught about their heritage.

In most cases, assimilation into the family by the "color-blind" approach is a way for the parents to teach the child that although their skin may be different from

of belonging by learning about and becoming conversant in her lineage, culture and language as different than mine rather than just assuming she will or should assimilate into my lineage, culture, and language" Park said.

According to the professor, this was not just an ethical and political decision; it was also practical.

Park said she believes that color blindness can only work on young children, but as children mature, they will enter a society where color is a factor, and good parenting consists of preparing a child of color for the real world.

For example, a white mother raising a black son should teach her child what it means to be a black male in a society in which black men are stereotyped as threatening, and unwarranted harm may come their way,

according to Park.

"To not see his color is to be delinquent as a parent, to fail to teach him the skills he will, regrettably, need to navigate a still racist society," Park said.

However unlike Soo's case, Park had said that teaching her daughter about her Guyanese culture was a bit easier due to the fact that she had an open adoption -

*"With being a minority, I was being held to an expectation of Asian, like in academics and stuff. But then I got the thing about being a privileged white person because I was raised with a white family."*

that of their parents, it does not mean they are not part of the family.

However, Park did not personally take the "color-blind" approach. She decided to explain to her daughter her Guyanese background and cultural heritage as an act of love.

"It also includes helping her to find her place in the world and her sense



meaning that her birth parents were also involved in her daughter's life.

For other adoptees, learning about their original heritage was not a part of their experiences growing up.

Suthern Fertig, a UCF anthropology sophomore, was adopted from Nanchang, China at fourth months old.

According to the Fertig, the sophomore's parents didn't begin teaching her about her Chinese heritage until she was much older, but she said that doing so might've been difficult because she has two other adopted siblings with different heritages.

"My whole family is a mini [United Nations]," she said.

It wasn't until Fertig was deliberating which language to study, that her mom encourage her to learn about her culture.

"I originally wanted to take German," Fertig said. "But my mom told me, 'Suthern, you're Chinese, so you should take Chinese.'"

There's also the issue of societal standards for some transracial adoptees.

Kayla Orr was adopted from Fuzhou, China when she was 13 months old by white parents and moved to a predominantly white community.

According to the UCF senior marketing

major, because of her outer appearances but white upbringing, she got mixed criticisms from people.

"With being a minority, I was being held to an expectation of Asian, like in academics and stuff," Orr said. "But then I got the thing about being a privileged white person because I was raised with a white family."

Both Fertig and Orr consider themselves white because of the environment they grew up in.

"From the outside I'm Asian, but on the inside I'm white because I was brought up by white parents," Fertig said.

However for Soo, she familiarizes herself with her Asian heritage.

"I don't think I'm white," Soo said. "I'm definitely, everyone says, 'whitewashed,' but I check off Asian, because that's what I am."

photo/SUTHERN FERTIG

# WASHED

*Two perspectives on how others see Asian Americans*

**BY GABRIELLA ALQUEZA**

When Jean-Ross Dayandante vacationed in the Philippines with his family, he expected open arms and warm welcomes. Instead, he received muffled laughter and subtle jabs at his funny accent.

"I even remember my cousins picking on me because I couldn't speak Tagalog, but there was this Caucasian kid that fit in with the Filipinos because he was a part of that culture," said Dayandante, a University of Central Florida health sciences sophomore.

Dayandante calls himself whitewashed.

"My taste in food, humor and music is more Americanized," he said. "I eat more American food and don't listen to Tagalog music because I don't understand it."

Whitewashed is defined as "a member of a racial minority group, often those of Asian heritage, who have culturally assimilated to white, Western culture. Whitewashed individuals know little of their native culture," according to RaceRelations.About.com

For UCF human communications associate professor Sally Hastings, the term can show one's disregard for his or her racial upbringing.

"Whitewashing is not a term I use, but it could mean complete assimilation to the culture with a tendency to deny ones background," she said.

Many young Asian Americans like Justin Velasquez see it when one tries to adjust into a new culture. It's no surprise that he might lose a bit of his heritage growing up in a foreign place surrounded by foreign experiences. When people come to the United States, the transition from one way of life into another may lead to some changes.

"It's a weird term. It's basically normalizing. Just taking bits and pieces from one culture and incorporating it with another," said Velasquez, a UCF sophomore engineering student.

He said he feels that because he doesn't

hang out with other Asians, people see him as whitewashed.

"I identify closely with my culture, but based on my actions people call me whitewashed," he said.

*"I identify closely with my culture, but based on my actions people call me whitewashed."*

For Velasquez, most of the criticism came from people of his own nationality. He believes this assimilation causes people to become more prideful of their culture.

"When they see someone losing their culture, you witness them become more protective of values and beliefs," he said.

Hastings explains negative responses to assimilation by saying it's a matter of power plays.

"The term is seen as negative because affiliating one's self with people of power, in this case, white people, when you're not in power is seen as affiliating with the oppressor," Hastings said.

She says that this kind of assimilation may just be a natural progression through time. When the next generation is born in the United States, it's only natural for them to be more tied to American culture compared to the last.



# AWAY



## BY NATALIE DOZIER

When Xue Wang applied for college, the University of Florida finance and Chinese junior and Asian Pacific Islander American Affairs student ambassador got mixed messages on which ethnic box to check.

“Some of the advice that I got was ‘Do not check that you’re Asian American. Check ‘Other’ instead,’” Wang said.

While Asian Americans may be classified as minorities on paper, some see them as closer to white people -- a phenomenon known as white passing.

The influence of this spans from everyday life to an institutional process.

During the college application process, Asian Americans have begun to fall out of the minority division. The ability to present oneself as “more white” in a college application can only go so far, especially when one’s name is often a significant clue in identifying

one’s background and ethnicity. Although this white passing occurs, it sometimes may not play as great of a role in the admissions process as some would like to believe.

Anju Kaduvettoor-Davidson, the assistant director of the UF Levin College of Law’s Center for the Study of Race and Race Relations, said that race is not always a factor in the admissions process.

“Some universities try not to look at race or admissions, and some do, but there are a lot of schools [that] want to increase their diversity,” Kaduvettoor-Davidson said. The identity that comes with a name, however, finds its way around these colorblind admission techniques.

White passing is not new.

“The reason why we view Asians [as white passing] is because they have been stereotyped into this non-threatening, overachieving, easy-to-get-along-with, very

foreign, very distant kind of people,” said Alexander Cena, the director of APIA Affairs at the UF. “They typically are thrown as the ‘buffer minority,’ and that label does both good and bad things. The Asian American community is, in some ways, very invisible.”

Although passing as white affects the Asian American community both positively and negatively, not all members of the Asian American community experience the effects.

Wang said she feels like she’s still treated like a minority.

“We sometimes may feel like we are a minority with [white people] and try to fit in with the white community, which results in the concept of white passing because you adopt qualities that your community has.”

Nevertheless, she said she

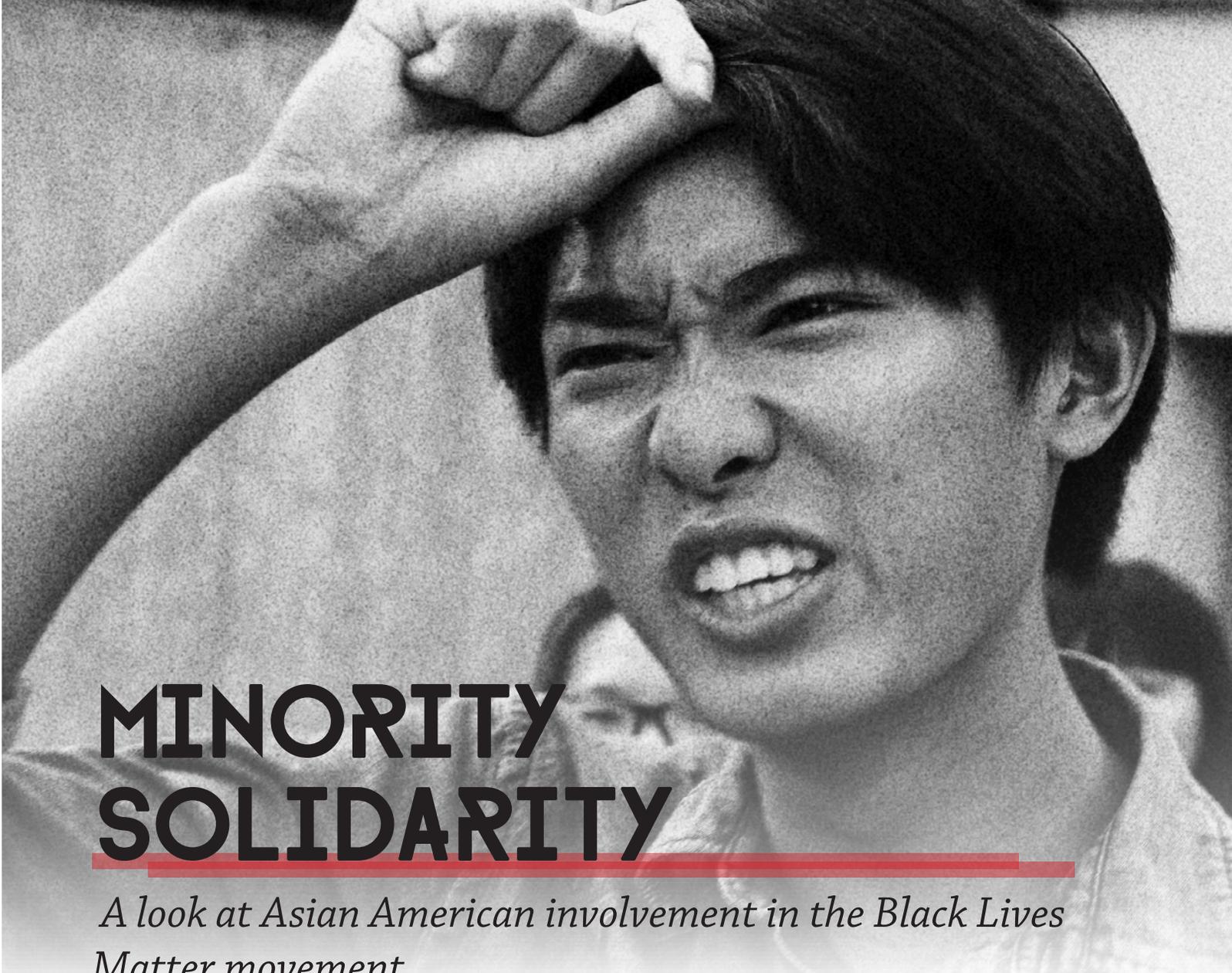
believes that her college application process was affected by her being an Asian American.

“But when you see my last name, you know that I’m Asian American,” Wang said. “There’s no factor to hide that.”

Passing as white plays a much larger role, and is not limited to the bounds of secondary education institutions. Daily treatment does differ amongst different races, and Asian Americans are no exception to these discrepancies.

White passing presents an odd give-and-take relationship when placed within the bounds of the Asian American community. Asian Americans can face both the limitations that come with minority status, but also an expectation to be as successful as the majority community.

*“Some of the advice that I got was ‘Do not check that you’re Asian American. Check ‘Other’ instead.’”*



# MINORITY SOLIDARITY

*A look at Asian American involvement in the Black Lives Matter movement*

**BY KYRA CLARK**

Asian Americans aren't the first ones who come to mind when you think of participants in the Black Lives Matter movement.

But Frederick Wong, a University of Florida healthcare administration graduate is involved with the Black Lives Matter movement by attending local rallies with his friends.

"We [Asian Americans] assimilate much better than other ethnic groups into this so-called greater American society," Wong said. "I think we are going in the right direction with the focus being on the African Americans' community because, as a whole, that one group needs the most help."

Wong, who is of Chinese American heritage, said that although the Black Lives Matter movement is the focus of minority rights, he said he believes that the strength of this movement could eventually empower other minorities to gain their own rights in this country.

Throughout the years, groups of different minorities have joined sides with the movement in an example of unity, rallying in the name of justice for the black community.

Nyla Duperval, president of the National Council of Negro Women at the University of Central Florida and a junior health informatics and information management major, sees this shared bond

firsthand as she has been involved with programs on campus, such as the March for Justice, where a diverse student body came to participate.

"The United States as a whole is not just one race or one ethnicity," she said. "It is a melting pot, so definitely having all those aspects of that melting pot coming together is really going to make the movement even stronger than what it is now."

When asked about her opinion on the importance of other minority ethnicities participating in the Black Lives Matter movement, Duperval said that minority involvement keeps people up-to-date on what's going on. "I think it is a very



photo/KEVIN DOAN

important movement, especially right now with what's going on in the media today and society," she said.

Seminole State College of Florida sociology professor Felix Padilla has published multiple books regarding social issues of minorities in America and finds the solidarity between Asian Americans and African Americans both productive and intriguing.

Padilla said that by having Asian Americans back up blacks in their fight against inequality, the Asian American community is undermining the model minority stereotype that is often used to disqualify minorities like blacks and Hispanics.

"What I find so intriguing about the Asian American support for Black Lives Matter is that our society has labeled the Asian American community as the 'model minority' but by labeling the Asian American community under that label - it's also a critique of the black and Hispanic communities," Padilla said, referring to how the Asian American community has constantly been spotlighted as the 'ideal' minority through American culture.

"I think the Asian American community, by supporting Black Lives Matter and supporting other initiatives of people of color, are also making a statement," Padilla said. "They're saying, in many words, that 'in spite of how you label us, we are not willing to remain outside the efforts of

overcoming inequality.'"

The Asian American community continues to lend strong support to the efforts of the Black Lives Matter movement through rallies as well as creating its own means of support through the hashtag, #Asians4BlackLives, which emerged after the deaths of Michael Brown and Eric Garner.

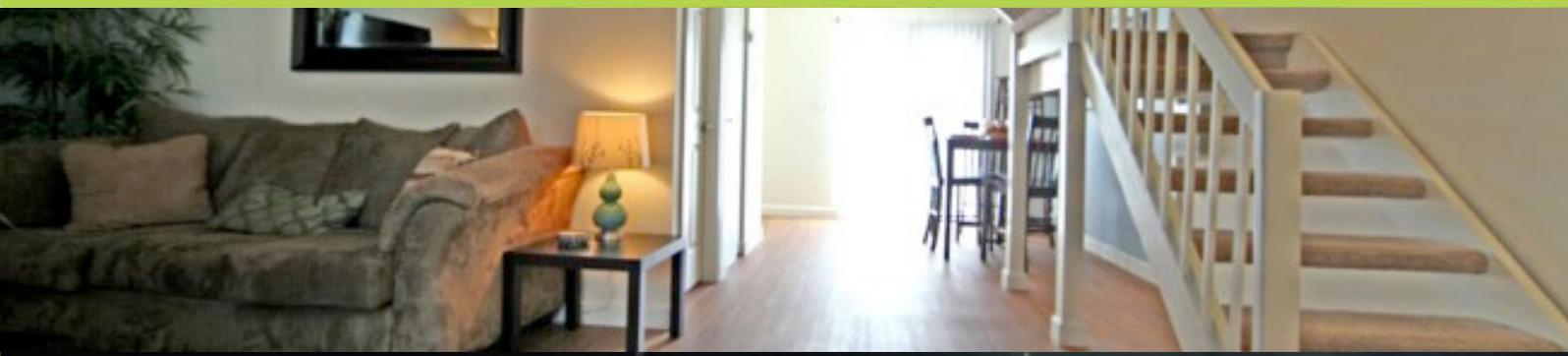
"I think it is beautiful," Peter Yane, a UCF biomedical science freshman, said of the social media campaign. "This certainly has shown how long of a way a simple hashtag can influence an entire movement."



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