Nathan's Group Overview

This semester we explored the experiences of multiracial individuals from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. We dissected the historical and current meanings of race and racialization, including the personal, community, and political implications of racial categorizations, racial purity, and newer ideas of multiraciality and changing boundaries. We considered racial identities and the negotiation of multiple, complex, and contradicting meanings of race and racialization. We also analyzed the diverse meanings and experiences of multiracial individuals in specific relation to various racial communities.

What is race? Race is a false classification of people; it is simply the distinction we make between groups of people that has absolutely nothing to do with any real accurate biological or scientific truth. Race is a political construction; something shaped by people and twisted for political purposes. The concept of race was created as a classification of human beings with the purpose of providing power to white people and to legitimize the dominance of white people over non-white people (Suyemoto & Dimas, 2003).

White privilege is a term that has historically been used to identify the privileges, opportunities, and gratuities offered by American society to anyone who is Caucasian and not a member of an ethnic group (Suyemoto & Dimas, 2003). It has been described as an "invisible package of unearned assets which I [as a white person] can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was 'meant' to remain oblivious" (McIntosh, 1989).

The concepts of ascribed and cultural identity are significant to the adoptee communities. People outside of the transracial adoptee community frequently scrutinize transracial adoptees based on their phenotype – physical characteristics. Transracial adoptees are assumed to be Korean, Latino or Latina, Vietnamese, etc. Yet, in some instances, from a cultural perspective, they couldn't be further detached from their racial community. Frequently, for transracial adoptees, who are monoracial and who have also lived most of their lives in the United States, they are culturally considered white. This occurrence of confused cultural identity results from their family experiences and socialization into society, "insecurities of not being 'white' enough slowly grew to a crescendo because whiteness was all I saw, day, and night. My family, teachers, peers were all 'white' on the outside. As a result, I was in denial about my Asian features and roots" (Kemp, 2001). However, it is not simply the monoracial transracial adoptees that experience confusion concerning ascribed and cultural identities; multiracial adoptees experience the notion of confused ascribed and cultural identity too. SI, one of the multiracial adoptees that we interviewed said "I was white during the week and Japanese on the weekends."

While both monoracial and multiracial adoptees must negotiate with ascribed and cultural identities, the multiracial experience has the potential to be a bit more confounded. Monoracial adoptees are almost never questioned because of their race, but because of their culture. Heather, one of our monoracial Korean adoptees noted that she has never been questioned because she doesn't "look Korean", but because she can't speak the language or doesn't understand the culture. However, J, a multiracial Black-Vietnamese adoptee, he has been confused by various ethnic communities for being Thai and Latino. SI, another one of our multiracial adoptees, has been considered white people from the Asian community, Asian by the Latino/Latina community and Black community, and "exotic" by the white community. So while monoracial and multiracial adoptees share similar experiences of marginalization by various communities, including their own "racial" community or communities, it is not as "black and white" for multiracials within the adoptee community. Not only do multiracials experience marginalization because of their culture, but they must also negotiate between various racial groups as well.