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Finding Voice in the Academy through Yellow Storytelling: An Asian American Autoethnography on Suffering in Higher Education

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FINDING VOICE IN THE ACADEMY THROUGH YELLOW STORYTELLING: AN ASIAN
AMERICAN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY ON SUFFERING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The College of Human Sciences and Education
School of Education
The Department of Education, Leadership, Research, & Counseling

by

Thuong Thi Nguyen
B.A., North Carolina State University, 2009
M.A., Louisiana State University, 2013
May 2017

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DEDICATION

Do not call me Dr.

If I get a Ph.D.

Just keep on calling me *Sweetie*

Cause that is good to me.

...

I don't believe in titles

When it comes to love,

So, please, do not call me Dr. –

Just call me *Turtle Dove*.

– Langston Hughes (1995, p. 300)

This work is dedicated to Keb, Grandmother Le, Grandmother Nguyen, and the people of Vietnam, whose lives continues to influence me to create purpose beyond titles and accomplishments. Through this text we are together infinitely.

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“Recite the trainings,

Practicing the way of awareness,

Gives rise to benefits without limits.

We vow to share the fruits with all beings.

We vow to offer tribute to parents, teachers, friends, and numerous beings

Who give guidance and support along the path.”

-Thich Nhat Hanh (1998, p. 102)

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ABSTRACT

Higher education institutions in the United States (U.S.) were founded for a select segment of the population, i.e. white Christian men from upper socioeconomic classes (Thelin, 2011). Research shows the policies, pedagogies, and practices created for use within majority populations and dominant cultures are not as beneficial or effective for individuals from underrepresented backgrounds. As the U.S. becomes more diverse and college enrollment among diverse students increases, higher education institutions need to identify more holistic approaches and investigate alternative methods to better serve these populations. This dissertation is a response to that need. In order to offer other alternatives, educators must acknowledge suffering in the origins of U.S. higher education and its replication of structural oppression. Institutions of higher education have recreated the wheels of suffering in U.S. society for generations by not acknowledging suffering or detailing how it affects students and employees; we are unskilled at mindfulness and lack *Tiếp Hiện*, which is translated as interbeing (Hanh, 2008). This research study employs the pedagogical tradition of the Zen Buddhist path and applies the practice of mindfulness and interbeing. Through critical Zen autoethnographic methodological approach, personal stories are shared and reflected on as a source for those who participate in the academy to potentially find alternative methods to heal.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH

The following excerpt is a memory of a translated conversation I had with my maternal grandmother about my first teacher in Vietnam. Italicized sections are conversational reflections with the spirits of those who have passed away.

Grandmother Nguyen: “Your mother is your teacher, so you have to see your teacher as your mother.”

Me: “My mother teaches me, but she’s not my teacher; and my teacher can never be my mother, because I have one mother.”

Grandmother Nguyen: “Even if someone teaches you one thing, they are forever your teacher, regardless of who they are. So you must treat them with kindness, respect, and compassion.”

Me: “*Thank you for helping me see how valuable it is to be a teachable human being.*

You’ve instilled in me the ability to be kind, respectful, and compassionate. I often return to our conversations whenever I am suffering.”

Grandmother Nguyen: “*We suffer so we can grow and change.*”

Overview

This chapter details one of the problems facing higher education in the U.S. and explains the relevance of addressing this problem through the use of personal narratives and self-reflection as critical Zen autoethnography. Factual personal stories will be shared in the form of conversations. This method was chosen because it is a Vietnamese tradition to stay connected to those who have shaped your being, past and present. The cultural art of communicating with past family members is used to share past narratives with those who are no longer living through the practice of *Tiếp Hiện* because we are and will be forever connected to one another. Their

names and the conversations are italicized. *Tiếp* means “being in touch with” and “continuing,” while *Hiện* means “realizing” and “making it here and now” (Hanh, 2008). Collectively, *Tiếp Hiện* refers to the order of interbeing for Buddhists practicing Engaged Buddhism, created by Vietnamese Buddhist Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh (1998) in response to the suffering and injustice experienced by marginalized groups in Vietnam during the Vietnam War. Interbeing teachings explain that everything and everyone are interconnected: I share past conversations and present narratives of the continued dialogues with the spirits of my loved ones as a way of performing *Tiếp Hiện*, and staying connected with the past and present implications of their presence in my life.

Child of Vietnam

Providing context for these narratives is paramount to the foundation of my epistemology and ontology as a college student. As a young child, I lived in Biên Hòa, Vietnam. Biên Hòa is a small, Catholic community one hour southwest of Sài Gòn (Hồ Chí Minh City). It is a small, tight-knit community able to enjoy the benefits of being near the capital city and its resources. When I was four-years-old, I ran away from home. I remember that day vividly. I stuffed my backpack with books, clothes, and two sweet potatoes. The backpack was more than half my size. No one saw me pack or leave. Everyone was usually preoccupied: my mother worked long hours, my oldest sister was always studying, and my second sister did most of the chores. Since my father left while my mom was pregnant with me, there was no male figure in the household. My father was considered a part of the “Boat People” who had successfully escaped Vietnam and created a new life for himself in the U.S. during Vietnam’s “Re-education Program” under the new Communist Regime. The “Boat People” refers to the hundreds of thousands of refugees from Vietnam and neighboring countries who endured the dangerous

journey of fleeing by sea to the U.S. (Caplan, Choy & Whitmore, 1989; 1991). I intentionally use this term because it embodies the horrors and suffering that my grandmothers, as well as the people of my country, experienced in order for my generation living in the U.S. to have the future we have today. As a result of my father's departure and prior to that his multiple failed attempts to depart Vietnam, our household income was extremely low; we lived in poverty. Each time my father tried to leave undocumented, he was jailed. He tried seven times. Each attempt was a financial burden on our family. This created debt and we only had one relatively steady low-income for a family of four (or five, if my father was home temporarily).

Much like my father whom I had never met, I was strong-willed. I decided to run away from home because my mother punished me for disrespecting my teacher. Earlier that day, I had told my kindergarten teacher she was not very smart because she was not teaching me anything new. Everything she was teaching, I already knew from home. In Vietnamese culture, the teaching profession is highly revered because the profession is symbolically tied to familial authority (Ngo & Lee, 2007; Nguyen, 2002). Disrespecting one's teacher is comparable to disrespecting your grandparents. Nonetheless, I resented this punishment because I was already schooled by my older siblings and cousins at home. In addition, I had an issue with authority who did not represent family. Institutionalized education disrupted and disrespected the informal education I received from family members at home. Thus, with my backpack on and with determination, I marched down to the end of the street. My mother taught me to never cross the street without an adult, so I was stuck at the corner for what seemed like an eternity. My neighbor came up to me and asked, "Little niece, why are you out here with your backpack by yourself?" I replied, "Uncle! I'm running away from home!" My neighbor was not my uncle, but Vietnamese culture asks us to form relationships right away using familial titles based on

gender, age, and profession. Although all languages are limiting in their own ways, the Vietnamese language, allows us to experience the world as a huge community as we address each other by familial titles (Hanh, 2007). I told him my story, and he listened intently: told me I was wrong and that my mother was justified for punishing me. I disregarded his comments and asked him to take me to my grandmother's house. She lived just a little down the block on the opposite side of where we were standing. I wanted to explain the story to her and figured she would be on my side. He told me, "Little niece, your grandmother cannot be on your side if you are wrong, even though she loves you." I frowned and said, "Please Uncle, she is the only one who will understand." He walked me to my grandmother's house, and I waited until she came home from the market. As she walked through the door, I explained everything right away and asked her if I could stay at her house permanently. My grandmother was a kind woman who smiled at everyone, even the neighborhood children who were rude and disrespectful. She smiled at me and said,

"Thuong, if you stay here, think about how your mother would feel. She already feels bad for punishing you, but as your mother, she had to make sure you understand you can always learn from people. You must not think you will ever be done learning. Your mother is your teacher, so you have to see your teacher as your mother."

I was suffering and was causing suffering. In Zen Buddhist philosophy, suffering is tied to discrimination and attachment to the impermanent: I was living in dualities (Hanh, 1998). I consider this my first moment of educational suffering because I had discriminated against my teacher.

College Student in the U.S.

Fast-forward 14 years to 2005: I had lived in the U.S. for ten years, had been adopted by an Irish Catholic family for five years, and was college bound. In the spring of 2006, I enrolled in the history and education program at a large public PWI southern state university, I will use the pseudonym of Sterling University (SU) for my undergraduate institution. I started college a semester ahead because I graduated early from high school. My adopted brothers helped me get ready for college: applying for scholarships and financial aid, scheduling classes, finding a place to live, etc. Everything was in place for me to have a successful first semester. Before starting my classes at SU, I decided to unofficially change my name to “Krystie” and not go by birth name of “Thuong” anymore. I was frustrated when people failed to pronounce my name correctly, especially because of the embarrassment I felt when people tried, but would say “thong” instead of *Thuong*. Through a slight tonal change, my name, which is a 1000-year-old Vietnamese root word, usually translated to compassion or love, metamorphosed into a sexualized undergarment in English. I chose Krystie to symbolize my *Americanness*: I chose Krystie because I was undergoing Kim’s (1981) Asian American racial identity development of white identification. I wanted to assimilate into white culture by having an Americanized name. This was a reaction to my understanding of agency. I was empowering myself to create a new me, enabling myself to leave my foreign name to only exist in the past, and living as an “American” in the present and for the future. However, as Shankar and Srikanth (1998) posit, changing one’s name can be interpreted as forfeiting one’s subordinate identity. I was performing an American identity to fit in, like many immigrants who change their names. This is a practice we perform to increase our chances of success in the U.S. (Amaya, 2007; Khosravi, 2012; Shankar & Srikanth, 1998).

I was an optimistic first year student in college and thought I was successful acculturating to the campus environment; however, the facade of my *Americanness* came at a price and began to haunt me with nightmares of the negative effects of acculturation as I realized the loss of cultural heritage and identity. Maloof, Rubin, and Miller (2006) studied Asian American acculturation and assimilation narratives and posit that these individuals were experiencing psychological stress from identity loss. From the indication of Maloof, Rubin, and Miller's (2006) study, I believe I was experience the psychological stress from actively participating in my identity loss. Whether I continued or pushed back against acculturation, I was simultaneously discriminating and was discriminated against. I unconsciously continued with the process of acculturation. For example, I recall lying about my love of basketball because my brothers thought that it was an "African American" sport. I stopped dating my partner because I thought they were too "ethnic" for me. I recall defending who I am as a Vietnamese immigrant to many peers who believed that all Vietnamese in the U.S. were communists. One of my most traumatizing experience at SU involved someone calling me a gook because, to them, I was "a communist and don't even know it." An emotional collection of discomfort, pain, anger, and fear created invisible moving walls strategically positioned within the university and its classrooms all across campus at SU. Those walls began to shrink inward and suffocate me to the point where I felt like I was dying. Reflecting on my decision to change my name ten plus years ago reminds me of Arthur Miller's play, *The Crucible* (1953/2003), where I see myself as the character of John Proctor, who knew the importance of one's name as he proclaims:

"Because it is my name! Because I cannot have another in my life! Because I lie and sign myself to lies! Because I am not worth the dust on the feet of them you have hanged!

How may I live without my name? I have given you my soul; leave me my name!” (p. 155).

I often reflect on my choice to change my name in shame. Krystie over Thuong. My perception of the university and who I was within it was inaccurate and is still inaccurate as I continue to use Krystie.

The University: A Location of Suffering

My identity, institutional climate, and organizational culture did not mesh, so I recreated myself in order to fit in. Unfortunately, this was the beginning of my suffering in higher education. The university is an ideal location to investigate these moments of suffering and identify ways to heal and regain our humanity for ourselves and others. Tiếp Hiện teaches the interconnectedness of who we are: person to person, community to community, event to event, action to action, location to location: all of it contributes to the reality of our interwoven collection of sufferings (Hanh, 1998). If we can heal ourselves, we are providing hope for our community. Hope is a Tiếp Hiện concept of reconciliation (Hanh, 1998; 2007). As Secretary of Transportation, Norman Mineta, once told me at a Young Leadership Summit, “We need to stop hurting ourselves by framing the U.S. as a melting pot. That does not acknowledge our individual contribution to this nation. We need to reframe our experiences as tapestry: each individual thread comes and are woven together to tell a story.” I claim my story as one of the threads in the U.S. tapestry and as a first generation Vietnamese American who works in higher education, sharing my stories and the importance of interbeing can reduce suffering and improve the overall institutional climate by providing hope to reconcile with our sufferings of being once told we were a melting pot of conformity. First, it is necessary to explicitly state the problem affecting U.S. higher education.

Statement of the Problem

Historical analysis of U.S. higher education investigates roots of controversy in access, design, affordability, curriculum, quality, social equity, and policies, to name a few (Birnbaum, 1983; Blackburn & Conrad, 1986; Brubacher & Rudy, 1997; Cohen, 1989; 2007; Goodchild & Wechsler, 1997; Knowles, 1994; Lucas, 2006; Merriam, 2008; Pinar, 2012; Thelin, 2011; Tinto, 1987). Access was limited to U.S. citizens that were white, Christian, males of higher socioeconomic status (Thelin, 2011). Higher education diversified over time, structurally and socially, borrowing concepts in philosophy, sociology, anthropology, psychology, law, counseling and other disciplines to construct epistemologies and literature (Astin, 1984; Ramsden, 2003; Tinto, 1987; Trowler, 2008). Serving diverse higher education constituent, for example, diverse students, faculty, staff, etc., is still a relatively new phenomenon in the 21st century compared to the founding of Harvard College in 1636 (Thelin, 2011). For practitioners, involvement with diverse students is influenced by existing literature and current research, including student development theories, higher education administrative courses, and direct sharing of stories to understand diverse students' experiences. (Gurin, Dey, et al., 2002; Torres, Howard-Hamilton & Cooper, 2003). These methods provide connective tissue between diverse students and the academy's institutional processes serving these populations. Research is still necessary in this space as the landscape of higher education becomes more diverse each year (Pryor, Hurtado, et al., 2007). Administrations are challenged to understand underrepresented and marginalized students in order to provide adequate aid to achieve metrics of success at the university. Despite this attempt, there is a concern that a majority of current literature and research continues to minimize diverse students' experiences in systems of categorical vectors, stages, and phases instead of recognizing the complexity of the phenomenon of intersectional

identities (Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Crenshaw, 1989; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Quaye & Harper, 2014). The effects are damaging when students do not fit into these systems.

Underrepresented and Underserved

The minimization of diverse students' experience in existing literature led several scholars to dig deeper into higher education diversity issues, such as the constructs of identities through ethnicity, race, gender, socioeconomic status, etc. (Anderson, 1988; Astin, 1984; Bell, 2012; Benjamin, 1996; Bird, 1996; Chapa & De la Rosa, 2004; Fleming, 1985; Gurin, Nagda & Lopez, 2004; Harvey & Knight, 1996; Hsia & Hirano-Nakanishi, 1989; Jones, 1997; Lee, 2002; Levy 1999; Ogbu, 1992; 1994; Pratt, 2002; Reay, Davies, et al., 2001; Rendón, Jalomo & Nora, 2000; Smith, 1989; Solomon, 1985; Sonn, Bishop & Humphries, 2000). Only within the last two decades did scholars produce significant literature on improving the experiences of college students with diverse backgrounds (Astin, 1984; Crozier, Reay, et al., 2008; Hu & Kuh, 2003; Jones, Castellanos & Cole, 2002; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Quaye & Harper 2014; Rendon, 1994; Rendon, Jalomo & Nora, 2000; Yorke & Thomas, 2003). Because research on diverse students' experience is a relatively new phenomenon, it is centered on African American and Hispanic students and leaves out many other ethnic minorities (Astin, 1982; Rendón, Jalomo & Nora, 2000). One of the most understudied groups is the Asian American college student, though they are the fastest growing ethnic minority group in the U.S. (Chang, 2007; Museus & Kiang, 2009; Teranishi, 2010).

Asian American Invisibility: The Model Minority Stereotype

There are many reasons why Asian Americans are understudied, including the construction of the Model Minority Stereotype (MMS). The MMS is the belief that Asian Americans have achieved overwhelming economic and academic success through hard work,

persistence, and following cultural beliefs and norms. Furthermore, Asian Americans are often believed to have “made it” and not have to face the invisible barriers of racism in education, economic, social, and political spheres (Chou & Feagin, 2008; Smith, Allen, et al., 2007; Smith, Hung, et al., 2011; Soto, Dawson-Andoh, & BeLue, 2011; Bonazzo & Wong, 2007; Hartlep, 2013, 2014; Ng, Lee, et al., 2007; Wang, 1995; Wing, 2007; Wong, Lai, et al., 1998; Zhang, 2010). The myth of the MMS as experienced by Asian Americans, perpetuates the idea that this population does not need support —ultimately making them invisible to campus support services (Teranishi, Behringer, Grey & Parker, 2009). Asian Americans students are suffering in U.S. college campuses because of their invisibility. One of the ways they suffer includes unacknowledged racial discrimination (Hancock, Allen & Lewis, 2015). As Sue et al. (2007) explains, Asian Americans have been historically targeted for acts of prejudice and discrimination that are being mostly ignored. Furthermore, as Steele (1997) posits, the stereotype of being the “model minority” created the assumption that these students should adapt into the institutional culture of racialized authority. In order to assist Asian American college students with their suffering, researchers must demystify the MMS that has caused them to be invisible (Museus, & Chang, 2009; Teranishi, 2012).

Purpose of Study

Arminio, Torres, and Pope’s (2012) *Why Aren’t we There Yet: Taking Personal Responsibility for Creating an Inclusive Campus* discusses our role of self in multicultural competence and education. One of the eleven characteristics of creating an inclusive campus is the belief that, if we understand our own cultural heritage and worldview, it will aid in our understanding of others’ cultural heritage and worldview. Ultimately, research on Asian American students’ experiences and their unexplored narratives of suffering is still necessary,

particularly in the south at PWI because a body of literature for this topic does not exist. However, the absence of evidence on Asian American students' experiences with suffering does not mean that the evidence that it exist is absent. Robert Teranishi (2002), a professor in education at the University of California, Los Angeles and a leading scholar in research on Asian American students' experience in higher education, has called for institutional leaders to continue research in order to better serve this population on U.S. college campuses. I am answering Arminio, Torres, and Pope (2012), and Teranishi's (2002) calls to action by including my own experience as an Asian American college student attending PWIs in the south. The goal is to create inclusive campuses by understanding my cultural heritage and worldview in adding to the paltry literature on Asian American college students in higher education.

As a participant in higher education for over a decade, both as a student and as a practitioner, the theme of suffering, and for the purpose of this research, what I hold as experiencing suffering will include emotional, psychological, and physical distress, pain, anguish, and anxiety, are woven within the fabric of my college experience. Serendipitously, I have been on the quest of finding inner peace and a source of healing through attending Buddhist dharma talks for the last decade. As Cassell (1991) writes, "[Suffering] cannot be treated unless it is recognized and diagnosed" (p. 531). This is true of any suffering. I suffered, but did not recognize or diagnose it to be suffering. Much of this can be attributed to the MMS and its harmful positive stereotypes on how Asian Americans have achieved academic success without any hardship (Cheryan & Bodenhausen, 2000; Chou & Feagin, 2008). Eventually, I noticed my suffering, but did not take initiative to acknowledge how detrimental it was to my well-being until I started my doctoral program. At the beginning of my doctoral journey, I believed there

would be an end to the suffering for me once I obtained my doctorate and my inner peace and healing would begin once I was done.

Finding Purpose: Awareness and Intention

In the last few years, the doctoral journey lost its meaning, as over time, nothing felt was worth putting myself towards as a member of an often silenced group...through the suffering of finding a voice, and the psychological effects that are attributed to that task (Hurtado, 1989). I needed aid in order to find meaning behind the doctoral journey by claiming space, demanding an audience, and pushing the research forward by employing an autoethnographic approach to investigate how suffering occurs as a first generation, Asian American, immigrant woman who has navigated higher education within the walls of PWIs in the southeast region of the U.S. Through storytelling and exploring nontraditional sources of healing for the systems that oppress and those who have been oppressed, I begin with awareness. Awareness of suffering is one of the fourteen mindfulness training of interbeing. As stated by Hanh (1998),

“Suffering can have therapeutic power. It can help us open our eyes. Awareness of suffering encourages us to search for its cause, to find out what is going on within us and in society. But we have to be careful, too much suffering can destroy our capacity to love” (p. 30).

The intention to be aware of Asian American college student experience and suffering is to equip institutional leaders of higher education to better serve this population (Teranishi, 2002).

Therefore, I turn to the qualitative method design of narrative inquiry, anecdotal reports via storytelling.

Why Storytelling?

We have used storytelling as a vehicle of inquiry for thousands of years (Minh-Ha, 1997). When we look at the dominant narrative on Asian American students, these stories have created limitations on Asian American experiences by (mis)categorizing Asian American students (Kawai, 2005; Saito, 1997). This research on individual student experiences is a way to “[confront] our narratives of education in places that are ill-prepared to provide educational service to a diverse community of learners” (Nguyen, Mitchell & Allen Mitchell, 2016, p. 48). In navigating the complexity of educational research on Asian American college students, I will try my best to avoid overgeneralizing their experiences through the telling of my own (Wu, 2003). I can contribute to the field of higher education with first-hand Asian American college student stories by using my own narratives.

Using Memories to Locate Moment of Inquiry

I remember being at a Brown Bag Lecture when a visiting professor asked the audience, “How many of you have lost a relationship in this process?” My mind raced through the years of being in the academy, and I teared up as I raised my hand. It was too many to count. I looked around the room and everyone’s hands were also raised. The question was vague, but my interpretation led me through images of irreparable friendships: an ex-fiancé, ex-partners, and my child/brother/cousin, Kevin, who I called Keb. The memories of Keb were the most painful. I always felt that if I were not so driven to graduate summa cum laude, could I have spent more time with him? Could I have noticed symptoms of terminal cancer sooner if I had slowed down and not worked four jobs to support my education? This was a moment of inquiry for me as I asked: “what kind of relationships did the people in the room lose,” “what are their stories,” and

“how else have they suffered?” This moment manifested in a process of asking: what is *my* story in higher education? What were the causes of suffering for me in higher education?

I began jotting down notes for my story, and it began on Keb’s death bed. Keb is my son/brother/cousin who was diagnosed with stage four cancer when he was 16 years old. Biologically, he is my cousin, but the Vietnamese culture does not have the word “cousin,” and our families moved to the U.S., lived, and grew up together. He and Amy, our youngest sister, moved down to San Diego to live with my mother and father when he was 14 years old. My father was physically and mentally abusing him and it was a terrible time for Keb and me. At that time, I was 19 years old and remembering my own circumstances at 12 years old, when I had to leave my family because of my father’s abuse. Remembering this brought back horrific pain for me. I had to get Keb out of that abusive environment. I worked double shifts, got another job, did everything I could, and, finally, Keb was able to move to the east coast with me. I had to prove to my birth family that I was independent and financially secure before I could help Keb. My adopted family was supportive, but I never shared my story with them fully, and they never really understood my motives. After Keb moved in with me, less than two years later, a month after I graduated from college, a day after my birthday, Keb was diagnosed with stage four cancer on June 26th, and went into surgery at 3:14 am on June 27th. Because he was a minor, I had to sign as his legal guardian, making him my son. The pediatricians at the hospital informed me that Keb had three months to live. If he was able to live throughout the three months given, he would be one month shy of turning 17. Keb passed away on Thursday, October 27, 2011. He fought the cancer for two years and four months. At the last stage of his life, Keb moved back to California on February 2011 to live with his father and sister

Amy. Before he had to move back, I remember our last conversation, translated and recounted here:

Thurong: “Keb. I know I cannot make this cancer go away. I’m sorry I was not there for you when you needed me. But is there anything I can do here so you can experience it with me in spirit?”

Keb: “You were there for me Thurong. You are here for me now.”

(We are both sobbing.)

Thurong: “I could have done more. I didn’t have to be so prideful; I did not ask for help.”

(We do not speak for several minutes.)

Keb: “I want to go to college. We set out three goals for me when I moved in with you.

To find a job, buy a car, and go to college. That is what I want to do with you in spirit.

Go to college.”

In August 2011, I moved to Louisiana and attended a PWI state university, Kora University (KU) and started my master’s program for Keb. I had researched programs and higher education was the perfect fit. I had my bachelor’s in history and education, and I wanted to work with college students and be at a university so Keb can always be at a university with me. It made sense to me.

Identifying Moments of Suffering in Higher Education

What did not make sense to me was feeling like I travelled back in time when I slowly opened the door and walked into my very first graduate course at KU and noticed that all the black students sat on one side and all the white students sat on the other side. Within the first eight months of employment in my graduate assistantship and interacting with my cohort, I witnessed numerous acts of discrimination, racial microaggressions, and microassaults.

To address these moments, my research design includes exposing my own silenced moments of suffering to bring context to my experience as a first generation, immigrant, Vietnamese American woman navigating the process of higher education in three specific moments during my bachelor's, master's, and doctoral program. I continue to feel disconnected in higher education, its spaces, people, ideas, and, at the same time, I feel disconnected from my heritage and culture as I try to fit in with the academy. I recognize that the methodological praxis of performing autoethnographic research allows me to reflect and analyze my personal experiences, then connect those stories (autobiographical) to cultural and social phenomena (ethnographic) (Adams, 2005; 2008). I will conduct a critical Zen autoethnography using journals from the past decade, novels, letters, speeches, notes, meeting agendas, interviews, reflexive journal entries (written reflections on recent events), academic papers, emails, poems, notes on photos, and my own memories and conversations from 2006 and onward- during the years I participated in higher education. Using these artifacts, I employ a Vietnamese artistic expression and cultural practice by communicating with spirits of past family members. I am talking to those who are no longer with me on earth (their name italicized) and, through interbeing, they are talking back.

One's own storytelling can be a source of healing (Bochner & Ellis, 2003; Burdell & Swadener, 1999; Minh-Ha, 1989; 1997; Trahar, 2009). Through investigating myself and my lived experiences, I will practice self-awareness, understanding, and embrace potential sources of healing in the academy through this process (Nghiem, 2010). I hope that it can create moments of (re)thinking and (un)learning in how I have navigated the academy, breaking away from the bondage of performativity and suffering that the academy has produced. Ultimately, this research carries with it a hope for social change through pedagogical means (West, 2008).

Being transparent and honest with the process, I realize that there is nothing “new” about what I am doing in adopting the approach of storytelling. Narrative/storytelling is at the heart of the human experience and is the primary means through which we have, historically, communicated our humanity. I am carrying on an educational tradition. As Minh-Ha (1997) states that storytelling has been at the heart of our pedagogy. I engage in storytelling, not to contribute to the limited existing epistemologies, but to strategically contribute to critical voices in education. I present a new perspective that has not been shared, and which I hope will resonate with those who have similar narratives.

Theoretical Frameworks

As a young child, I was my grandmothers’ student, sitting for hours, listening to, and learning from, the stories of our being. The stories that strengthened our relationship the most, were the stories that taught me how to navigate the world as a Vietnamese woman. Similarly, as I now engage with my own stories in this research space, I am searching for the most provocative elements in order to strengthen the relationship between education theory and stories (Burdell & Swadener, 1999). As I continue in the tradition of storytelling, I am reminded that these constructs, as Minh-Ha (1989) posits, “... never really begin nor end, even though there is a beginning and an end to every story, just as there is a beginning and an end to every teller... The story never stops...” (p. 1). As an adult, these never-beginning/never-ending stories have become my tools to (re)build relationships with research, the academy, and myself.

In my journey as a first generation, immigrant, Vietnamese American woman in higher education, I identify my moments of suffering from discrimination and the effects of acculturation at PWIs in the southeast region of the U.S. I suffered from being silenced and invisible as the model minority (Bankston, Caldas & Perea, 1997; Chung, 2001; Wu, 2003). In

order to tell my story, I adopt the theoretical frameworks of Asian Critical Race Theory (AsianCrit) (Chang, 1998; Crenshaw, 1991; Hartlep, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Wong, Koo, et al., 2011; Wu, 2003; Allen, Hung, Franklin, Chou & Feagin, 2008; Teranishi, 2002; Yosso, 2005) and Zen Buddhist philosophy (Hanh, 1997, 1998, 2000). I will explore the intersecting concepts of identity development through ethnic, racial, and gendered lenses: AsianCrit, the MMS, and yellow peril all help to dissect my moments of exposure to discriminatory suffering. In addition, I present concepts from Zen Buddhist philosophy of the Three Jewels, Four Noble Truths, and Eightfold Path, and specifically the practice of mindfulness and interbeing (Hanh, 2007; 2008; 2010; 2012; 2013), to intersect my stories on an individual, institutional, and cultural level. These concepts are developed further in the literature review.

I use the Three Jewels to deconstruct the concept of dualism in community and the self; I use the Four Noble Truths of suffering to explore stages of suffering, and I use the Eightfold Path as the alternative method to process higher education and its limited epistemologies, which cause suffering. As Hanh (2010) often asks of his students: “how can we contribute to the harmony of our community of difference, if we ourselves have been hurt by these differences?” The challenge is not to betray ourselves in these moments of suffering, or stay disconnected in the experiences, but, instead to 1) look to these moments 2) acknowledge them 3) identify their source 4) find and apply the solution and 5) liberate oneself (Hanh, 2008).

These narratives set the stage to examine the clash between culture and character (Tan, 1990), which leads to moments of discrimination, disconnection, alienation, and isolation. If the university is the location at which I research my suffering, then the concept of the MMS and how Asians have “made it” in the western world as a minoritized group (especially in higher

education) is my starting point for the suffering experienced in college (Chou & Feagin, 2008; Smith, Allen, et al. 2007; Smith, Hung, et al. 2011; Soto, Dawson-Andoh, 2011; Bonazzo and Wong 2007; Hartlep, 2013; Ng, Lee, et al. 2007; Wang, 1995; Wing 2007; Wong, Lai, et al. 1998; Zhang, 2010). Retelling and reliving suffering is foundational to the alternative method of the Zen Buddhist path where I find the strength and inner peace to tell my stories.

Delimitations and Limitations

Stories can rarely be fully explored. Boundaries are at times set for self-preservation, among other reasons. Here, I give myself the space to set boundaries in order to not relive moments of suffering to the fullest extent; I will spare some details. As my grandmother advised, “sometimes your stories are just yours.” While I am passionate about my research design and using myself as the subject, there are limitations. Meloy (2001) asks, “are you prepared to question yourself?” (p. 107), and my answer to this question has changed considerably since I began this journey. I am not sure how I will end up once I finish with my doctoral program, but I know that some of my suffering does not have a clear contribution to this research, and I have withheld those narratives in order to honor what it means to be the research subject. Mason (2002) describes this type of scenario in research as, “researching from the inside” (p. 205). The process of researching oneself is about exploring limited memories (Dillard, 1994). Memories are never singular and are necessarily interconnected. Reliving and retelling them through stories is time consuming (Lapan, Quartaroli & Riemer, 2012). With research, time can be a limitation (Creswell, 2012). Focusing on these stories is lonely and isolating, which becomes dangerous at times. It can become painful and unbearable (Mercer, Kythreotis, et al., 2011; Oowler, 2010). The challenge is to acknowledge and continue to develop strengths to combat what Gardner and Holley (2011) call, “the invisible barriers” when conducting research.

Concluding Thoughts

Socialized in society as a high achieving minority woman through the lens of the MMS, I doubt myself relentlessly, and as these lessons are reinforced in the academy, they limit my voice (Allen, 1995). I am limited by the “imposter syndrome;” I am unable to internalize my accomplishment, and I fear that society will realize my ‘unbelonging.’ MMS barriers begin with overcoming the fear of failure (Ewing, Richardson, et al., 1996; Gardner & Holley, 2011; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Gibson-Beverly & Schwartz, 2008). I am working to unpack both the negative effects of the MMS and imposter syndrome simultaneous through storytelling. Whenever memories get too painful, and the fear of failure creeps in; I close my eyes and remember grandmother Le. She told me, “the prettiest lotus flower grows in the muddiest land.” I did not realize it then, but grandmother was quoting Thich Nhat Hanh, and throughout this dissertation, I come back to a quote from Hanh’s (2014b) *No Mud, No Lotus: The Art of Transforming Suffering*:

“If you know how to make good use of the mud, you can grow beautiful lotuses. If you know how to make good use of suffering, you can produce happiness. We do need some suffering to make happiness possible. And most of us have enough suffering inside and around us to be able to do that. We don’t have to create more” (p. 14).

I rely on the Zen Buddhist path to address these limitations in the research by practicing mindfulness and by “letting go” in order to embrace the “muddy” stories for their research value (Hanh, 1998).

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

It was always my intention to go to college in the southeast region of the U.S. because I preferred the culture, food, and temperature, which reminded me of Vietnam. My adopted family from New York was displeased because they believed that getting a degree in the south would mean less opportunities for me. It was their implicit bias that had them believe southern education had lower standards. These biases are explained in Watkins' (2001) historical perspectives on black education in the south in *The White Architect of Black Education: Ideology and power in America, 1865-1954*. The major players, or architects as Watkins (2001) called them, who built black southern education, were all white men. These men thought themselves enlightened, forward-thinking, and progressive saviors of black folks; therefore, creating an explicit hierarchy of how education was perceived by northerners. The narratives of educational hierarchy are harmful because it permeates not only in education, but towards the people, community, and society in the south. Thus, as I continue my education at universities in the southeast region of the U.S., I find that southern education never completely found its place in the ivory tower because of how it has been narrated throughout history.

Introduction

“Education is suffering from narration sickness” – Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 2000

When examining the relationship between student, teacher, and society, Freire (2000) proposed the co-creation of knowledge to overcome the mutually reinforced relationship of oppressed and oppressor in order to heal ourselves from that which we suffer, ultimately gaining critical consciousness in the process of reclaiming our humanity. Freire's quote personifies how our pedagogical approach lives, breathes, and “narrates” with sickness (p.71). Presently, 50+ years

after *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was first published, education still suffers from narration sickness. In the university space, I still find it hard to express a liberatory voice about reality as a first generation immigrant Vietnamese American woman studying at PWIs in the southeastern region of the U.S. The knowledge of the academy is still divisive and discriminatory, similarly to Watkins' (2001) historical analysis of the north and south construct of black southern education. Furthering Friere's claim, the academy functions within its own epistemologies - its existing, co-created knowledge (Davis, 2004). Unfortunately, university administrators are unskilled in Vietnamese Buddhist mindfulness (interbeing/Tiếp Hiện), and continue to struggle with oppressive pedagogical means within discriminatory knowledge sets and persons (Hanh, 1998). Interbeing comes from an ontological background that is not valued in western societies: where interpretation of individualism are created as contrary and even can contrast with interbeing. Whereas interbeing recognizes the individual contribution to communities. The concept of mindfulness, a practice derived from the same ontological vehicle as interbeing, is centered on one's willingness to put effort into developing a heightened awareness (Hanh, 1998), including "one's *ethical know-how*, which in turn is the mode with which the teacher can engage with learners" (Davis, 2004, p. 214). Tiếp is "being in touch with" and "continuing;" Hiện is "realizing" and "making it here and now" (Hanh, 1998, p. 3). In research, as Lapan, Quartaroli, and Riemer (2012) explain, an epistemological approach asks questions about how we arrive at particular knowledges, whereas an ontological approach is the inquiry about the nature of our reality, what it means to be. When we train and socialize ourselves to understand the order of interbeing and the art of mindfulness, we investigate connectivity of being; we practice unknowing and question ourselves rather than constructing meanings and trying to understand others from a western point of view. Trying to understand the meaning in others' behavior can

cause discrimination and divisiveness: to unknow is to take the nature of the subject's ontology as a given to form the basis for epistemology (Perkins, Jay & Tishman, 1993). I will further elaborate on the concept of interbeing and mindfulness in my literature review, but first, I must turn to the Zen Buddhist Path, where the teachings of interbeing and mindfulness are found.

I challenge the epistemology of the U.S. higher education system through unknowing (examining biases by taking the failure of the dominant pedagogy to address Asian American suffering as a given) with the tradition of the Zen Buddhist Path, Noble Truths of Being and Suffering, and Engaged Buddhism to aid me (Hanh, 2007). I am interested in how we can use research to examine and understand moments of suffering in higher education for those who have been historically oppressed and discriminated against. I hope to find sources of healing in the academy for both the oppressed and oppressors (Nghiem, 2010). As Torres, Howard-Hamilton, and Cooper (2003) posit, "Theory protects us against our own unconsciousness," and like bell hooks (1994), I came to theory because I was suffering.

Narrated Epistemologies of Diversity in Higher Education as an Institution

Susan P. Choy (2002) conducted a 10 year longitudinal research effort on U.S. college students and found that on average (p. 2):

- Students on college campuses are diverse
- 30 percent of students are classified as minorities
- 20 percent were born outside the United States or have a foreign born parent
- 11 percent spoke a language other than English while growing up
- 60 percent are "nontraditional" students.

It is conclusive in Choy's (2002) findings that diverse students are present on campus. Women are now the majority (Pearson, Shavlik & Touchton, 1989), and the 2005 U.S. census projects half of the population will be racial/ethnic minorities by 2050 (Hurtado, 2006). Their presence has changed U.S. higher education (Chickering, 1981; Newman, Couturier & Scurry, 2010;

Smith, Altbach & Lomotey, 2002; Terenzini, et al., 1994; Thelin, 2011). These changes came with a backlash as U.S. campuses witnessed a major shift at the turn of the twenty-first century as investment and commoditization of higher education solidified the image of the ivory tower (the assertion that higher education institutions are primarily a tool of the privileged). The U.S. saw a continuous rise in cost for a college education (Etzkowitz, Webster, Gebhardt & Terra, 2000; James & Hollinghurst, 2004; Thursby & Thursby, 2002), conflicting with social and demographic changes in the U.S., higher education and discriminating against diverse students (Gurin, Hurtado & Gurin, 2002; Kluger, 2011; Newman, Couturier & Scurry, 2010; Patterson & Freehling, 2001). Although access is limited, diverse students do continue to influence all aspects of higher education's strategic goals, recruitment, alumni donation, and retention (Hurtado, 2006; Schuh, et al., 2011; Van Vught, 2008).

In other words, despite racist structural barriers, a diverse campus is still a monetized benefit for profitable universities. Some scholars and administrators have continued the good work of creating access for diverse students by conducting objective research, which shows positive outcomes associated with having a diverse college campus. Some of the findings included the fact that students who graduated in a diverse environment have a more positive economic and social impact through leadership skills and cultural knowledge than those who do not (Antonia, 2000, 2001a, 2001b; Antonia, et. al., 2004; Chang, 1999; Ely & Thomas, 2001; Milem, Chang & Antonio, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Phinney & Osorio, 2006). Thus, efforts to diversify U.S. campuses continue to increase the number of diverse bodies in higher education (Antonia, 2001; Jones, 1997). However, the universities' epistemologies on diverse college students are still limited and monolithic, as a consequence, suffering still occurs because there is still a lack of institutional understanding, support, and services for diverse issues

(Ladson-Billings, 2000; Jones, 1997; Pope, 2000; Reis, Colbert & Hébert, 2004; Tinto, 2006; Ogbu, 1992). In response, scholars have turned to identity development theories to investigate diverse students' needs.

Narrated Epistemologies on Identity Development Theories

Early research on college student experience is influenced by psychologist Erick Erickson (1959/1994), who theorized that social and personal identity is most developed during early adulthood. Thus, identity development is at the axiom of research in higher education, as a student's ability to learn is primarily influenced by personal identity. Further diversified exploration on identity development in college students continued with theorists such as Marcia, Josselson, Newcomb, Piaget, Astin, Chickering, and Reisser to name a few, but many did not incorporate the multiplicity and intersectionality of identities such as gender, ethnicity or race (Torres, Howard-Hamilton & Cooper, 2003; Evans, et. al., 2009; Phinney & Alipuria, 1990). As with most of the knowledge base in western universities, the foundational research taught in higher education programs was formed by the dominant group, often times through the lens of White, protestant, affluent men, who provided narratives on diverse students that many times minimizes their experiences (Anderson, 1988; Bell, 2012; Benjamin, 1996; Bird, 1996; Chapa & De la Rosa, 2004; Gurin, Dey, Hurtado & Gurin, 2002; Gurin, Nagda & Lopez, 2004; Harvey & Knight, 1996; Hsia & Hirano-Nakanishi, 1989; Jones, 1997; Lee, 2002; Levy 1999; Ogbu, 1992; 1994; Phinney, 1996; Pratt, 2002; Reay, Davies, et al., 2001; Rendón, 1994; 2000; Rendón, Jalamo & Nora, 2000; Smith, 1989; Solomon, 1985; Sonn, Bishop & Humphries, 2000; Torres, 2011). Diverse identity development scholarship has been unpacked by fewer scholars, such as Josselson's (1987) women identity development, Atkinson, Morten, and Sue (1979/1989)'s minority identity development, later renamed 'racial/cultural identity development' (Torres,

Howard-Hamilton & Cooper 2003), or Myers et al (1991) optimal theory applied to identity development (OTAID). These theoretical frameworks contribute to working knowledge of diverse college student identity. As the demographics in higher education continue to diversify (Birnbaum, 1983), institutions must be equipped to handle the more diverse issues that students bring to campus (Smith, 1996); therefore, continued research on diverse students and their development is critical to increase our understanding and awareness (Chang, Miley & Antonio, 2011; Dey, 1996, 1997; Pope, 2000), which are tenets of interbeing.

As Louis Morley and Val Walsh (1996) postulate, “It is always a challenge to engage intellectually and politically with issues of difference, without being open to allegations of tokenism and further marginalization” (p. 11), and at the same time it is difficult to justify and emphasize the importance of such research even though “difference had been used so cruelly against us that as a people we were reluctant to tolerate any diversion” (Lorde, 2007/1984, p. 136). I take on this challenge by contextualizing the differences of diverse student identity development from a fluid and complex intersection of gender, ethnic, and racial lens to fit within the scope of my methodology of conducting an autoethnography on an individual, institutional, and cultural level; whereas I find my gender, ethnicity, and race are necessary in the contribution of critical storytelling. I am influenced by Hancock, Allen, and Lewis’s (2015) explanation that we may use these factors of who we are to tell the “human struggles or strengths in an effort to illuminate sociohistorical and sociopolitical inequities... [and] seek to enlighten, empower, and engage...” all who have suffered by the institution of higher education (p. 8). Other factors contributing to diversity such as sexual orientation, gender expression, social class, abilities and disabilities, and spiritual identities, to name a few, are equally important to include in future research to increase understanding and awareness of those who suffer from discrimination.

Narrated Epistemologies on Diverse Identity Development

Our understanding is that social identity is developed during adolescence and early adulthood, i.e. during college (Erickson, 1954/1994). Students entering into college come with their own set of lived experiences that affects *who* they are and *how* they will become adults (Terenzini, et al., 1994). For diverse students, their prior experiences often separate them from transitional practices that would work for the dominant student population. The environment put in place (or left to chance) by education practitioners highly influences how they navigate through college, and will be incorporated into their social identity (Gurin, et al., 2002; Terenzini, et al., 1994). For the purpose of this research, I first focus on identity development of my gender (woman), ethnicity (Vietnamese), and race (Asian) separately. As Kim (2012) suggests,

“There are several ways to explore an individual’s identity. While it is generally acknowledged that an individual’s identity is comprised of multiple dimensions... a traditional approach has been to explore identity through a single lens or dimension...”
(p. 139).

I explore single identities and their working epistemologies to map out what it means to be on the margins and to confront the narrowing/minimizing effect that overgeneralizations can have at the intersection of identities (Crenshaw, 1991). I employ the traditional approach of exploring single identities (gender, ethnicity, and race) and will shift my approach to intersectional identities, beginning with gender, which, according to Leslie McCall, has had important theoretical contributions to the paradigm shift in research of single identities to intersectional identities. Self-identifying as a woman doing research, I am cautioned by Torres (2011) that “it is important to recognize that women encourage silencing behaviors among themselves” (p. 198) and as Audrey Lorde’s (1984/2007) *Sister Outsider* explains, in respect to the unlearned lessons

from generation to generation of women silencing each other, that “there is a historical amnesia that keeps us working to [re]invent the wheel every time” (p. 117). Acknowledging Torres (2011) and Lorde (1984/2007) means connecting the idea of how suffering occurs by not acknowledging how we silence one another, thus reinventing the wheels of oppression for women. As a woman who has been mentored by women, both in and out of the academy, the university is not immune to these issues, and therefore, I find it necessary to explore gender identity development in higher education.

Narrated Epistemologies of Gender Identities

The word ‘gender’ is often used as though it is synonymous with sex; however, they are very different. In identity theory, gender is socially constructed (Ropers-Huilman, 2003; Torres, 2011); the identity theory taught in higher education has traditionally mirrored society’s binary male/female conception (Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1988). Here, I explore gender from a woman’s identity development perspective to dissect how higher education practitioners have failed gender identity development, particularly women of color and immigrant background who occupy the liminal spaces outside of the black/white paradigm (Iijima, 1997).

Research on women in higher education has only found momentum in the last few decades. An influential scholar in the field, Barbara Solomon (1985), wrote *In the company of educated women: A history of women and higher education in America*, which offers a historical perspective on how/why educating men has always been more lucrative than educating women. This perspective on how women first gained access and navigated within U.S. higher education as one of the first U.S. marginalized groups for which higher education played a factor in identity development (Solomon, 1985) is complemented by Downing and Roush’s (1985) five stages for women’s identity development, published the same year. The five theoretical stages are:

revelation, embeddedness, emanation, synthesis, and active commitment. Two years after Solomon, Downing, and Roush's work was published, Josselson (1987, 1998) provided an overview of women's identity development as a woman's struggle to be competent in her identity and the balance to connect with others as a woman. This chronological illustration of research on women's participation in higher education pertaining to their identity development showed that the 1980s was a renaissance period for scholars contributing to unsilencing women's participation in higher education (Gallos, 1989; Solomon, 1985). Their contribution to the field continues through present day scholarship to assist in the necessary processes of unlayering the complexity in the experiences of women at U.S. college campuses (Neumann & Peterson, 1997). It is acknowledged that issues of multiple and intersecting identities for college women were excluded from research. Those on the margins are often confronted with being further marginalized, and the changing landscape of higher education demands these narratives unsilenced. (Hill & Thomas, 2000; Hurtado, 1989; Jones, 1997; Kim, 1981; Lorde, 1984/2007; Morley & Walsh, 1996; Phan, Rivera & Roberts-Wilbur, 2005). Like many women of color in the academy, I occupy the marginal spaces where my ethnicity and race has influenced my gender identity development. Even though progress was made for women in the academy, it did not mean the progress was for all women, including women of color, or women of different national origin from the U.S. Here I explore the epistemologies of ethnic identity development within higher education.

Narrated Epistemologies of Ethnic Identity

Newman, Couturier, and Scurry (2010) explain, "Today, more than 70 percent of students of color attend a predominantly Black or Hispanic elementary and secondary school" (p. 162). Diverse students coming to U.S. campuses are experiencing culture shock. These students of

color are bringing their lived experiences from non-white grade school to college and are finding a monolithic view from the college of who they are as diverse individuals (Braxton, 2000).

Rendón, Jalomo, and Nora (2000) elaborate on previous epistemologies of diverse college students,

“...the idea that [diverse] students are not motivated to learn or have low expectations has been around for decades, and ignores how systemic inequities, racism, and discrimination have worked against [diverse] populations” (p. 129).

In many colleges, it is still prevalent practice for those supporting diverse students to help them acculturate/assimilate towards the dominant group, separating themselves from their cultural realities as a means to be “successful” in college (Rendón, Jalomo & Nora, 2000). This is an act of ontological erasure. In addition, many diverse college students experience the dynamic of “breaking away” from their family and community in order to gain educational mobility, which often requires some form of reconciliation for familial membership later on in their life (London, 1989). This is a harsh reality for diverse students as they find themselves in limbo between what they left behind (home and family) and what is here and in front of them (the university and society). Thus, the idea of family and culture, the foundational components of their previous lived experiences, are being challenged during a time when they are supposed to be furthering their identity development. They are suffering from the transition, and many in higher education are aiding in their suffering because the university does not acknowledge or recognize this is happening to many students of color. My experiences in Vietnam shaped my identity through my experiences with family and culture (Chung, 2001; Phinney, 1989). My experience of leaving the home for the university is comparable to the university adopting me. However, when I come back home, I am looked at as an “outsider” because of the misconception of how the university

(the adopted family) has changed who I am. When I come back to the university, my ethnic identity is stunted because there was no support and or real acknowledgement of who I am and who the university accepted in their family. The academy and its epistemologies on diverse college students, particularly that of an immigrant Vietnamese American woman, created struggles for me and my identity development, particularly between my cultural identity and my nationality. Here, I examine the literature and the constructed epistemologies on Asian ethnic identity development and its theories within the institution of higher education.

Narrated Epistemologies of Ethnic Identity Development

Our understanding of ethnic identity development is a difficult task because it does not have a clear theoretical framework and has a limited empirical base (Phinney, 1996). Scholarship on ethnic identity development has increased awareness of the important role culture and ethnicity play in diverse college students' development, but it is still limited (Chung, 2001; Phinney, Dennis & Osorio, 2006). We do know that current research relies heavily on studies of ethnic development in adolescent identity formation, social identity theory, and acculturation (Lee & Yoo, 2004; Torres, 2011; Yeh & Huang, 1996). Phinney and Alipuria (1990) define ethnic identity development as a process, which includes exploring the self, attitudes, behaviors, and membership within that ethnic group to come to an ethnic identity. Phinney (1990, 1992) includes three stages for ethnic identity development: unexamined ethnic identity, ethnic identity search/moratorium, and ethnic identity achievement. Many scholars have employed Phinney's (1992) created instrument, multigroup ethnic identity measure (MEIM), to assess ethnic identities within multiple groups or to create other instruments, such as the ethnic identity scale (EIS) (Umaña-Taylor, Yazedjian & Bámaca-Gómez, 2004). However, the existing research is entirely comprised of adolescents, and does not account for intersectionality (Avery et

al., 2007). Most of the literature for Asian American ethnic identity development is based on Phinney's (1989) research on Asian American adolescents. Thus, I turn to Asian ethnic identity development to further investigate existing literature.

Narrated Epistemologies of Asian Ethnic Identity Development

Defining and measuring ethnic identity development can contribute to understanding diverse student needs, but studies of many ethnic identities are oversimplified, underdeveloped, and fragmented (Min, 2002; Phinney & Alipuria, 1990; Ruiz, 1990; Tse, 1999; Wong, 1999; Yeh & Huang, 1996). Ethnic identity research is still in its developmental stages, much of the existing research cannot be generalized to adults/college students (Avery, et al., 2007). There is a need for collectivistic approaches that recognize the impact and importance of college aged students in specific ethnic groups. Researchers who study Asian American college students, for example, often dismiss factors which include gender, race, relationships, social context, and other external forces that are crucial aspects of their identity development (Chung, 2001; Yeh & Huang, 1996). The lack of epistemologies on Asian American college students' ethnic identity development in higher education creates moments of suffering, as Chung (2001) explains:

“Despite the prevalence and importance of these issues in Asian American communities, surprisingly little empirical research is available on immigrant families, even within an increasing body of psychological research on Asian Americans in the last two decades...In contrast to the prevailing myth of homogeneity, the past decade of research on Asian Americans has demonstrated that there are important dimensions within group differences” (p. 377).

If research on ethnic identity development and Asian American identity development is limited, Vietnamese American ethnic identity development research for college students and

their needs in higher education is almost nonexistent (Duan & Vu, 2000; Lee & Yoo, 2004; Nguyen, Messé & Stollak, 1999; Iwamoto & Liu, 2010). Lack of research is damaging because it renders us more vulnerable, silenced, and invisible. As Arminio, Torres, and Pope (2012) states,

“The scholarly literature on Asian Americans in U.S. higher education almost never covers history before the 1970s, and more often begins in the 1980s... The gap in the history of higher education reflects an issue that continues to face Asian Americans in higher education: the presumption that their experiences are neither fully minority nor majority, making their experiences invisible” (p. 63).

The complexity of being Vietnamese in the U.S. creates challenges in how we see and classify ourselves: Vietnamese (Vietnamese born living in the U.S.), Vietnamese American (Vietnamese first, and then American), American Vietnamese (American first, and then Vietnamese), Vietnamese American (Vietnamese and American), American Vietnamese (American and Vietnamese), Amerasian (Vietnamese mixed raced) or American (American with Vietnamese ancestry) (Ng, 2014; Ngô, 2005; Phan, Rivera & Roberts-Wilbur, 2005; Zhou & Bankston, 1998). In addition, the classification of being Vietnamese is complicated in that we are middlemen minorities within the Asian minority; we are sometimes classified as south Asians for statistics of poverty and low socioeconomic status but southeast Asians for academic and career attainment (Arminio, Torres & Pope, 2012; Ngo, 2006; Skinner, 1998).

The academy and its epistemologies on diverse students, particularly that of an immigrant Vietnamese American woman college student, created struggles for me and my identity development. My narrative of suffering due to education institutional failure begins with moving to the U.S. and living in a predominantly Asian community in California, where I attended

diverse schools. During first through eighth grade, I mainly stayed within culturally familiar groups. As Dey, Hurtado, and Gurin (2002) explain, most college students lived in segregated communities before going to college and their identity development is affected by their childhood exposure and interaction. After being adopted by an Irish Catholic family, I was socialized into a state of post-racial colorblindness because my racial and ethnic identity was not acknowledged; this approach foreshadowed my experiences on U.S. college campuses in the south. My adopted family believed that the erasure of all traces of my “Asian” identity would help me to adapt and be accepted by the rest of my family and society. During my undergraduate years at a SU, my choices in activities were catered to the white majority, I dated white partners, went to a predominantly white church, had all white professors/instructors, and my social groups consisted of white friends. At the end of my junior year, I was re-exposed to my culture and race when I reconnected with my birth family. Only after that reconnection did I realize I had suffered negative effects from acculturation and assimilation, such as a loss of my Asian identity, stress from never truly being accepted by the dominant culture, and low self-confidence (Antonio, 2004; Chung, 2001; Cress & Ikeda, 2003; Duan & Vu, 2000; Gim, Atkinson & Whiteley, 1990). Those who had good intentions in supporting me through college, including faculty, staff, peers, family, and myself, were challenged to *unknow* the monolithic and hegemonic epistemologies of what it means to be an Asian American attending college. Much of my undergraduate experience was debunking the model minority myths and those who challenged and attempted to erase my Asian *and* American ontology (Hartlep, 2011). For example, I was in a situation where I was the only Asian American in a class where issues from Asian countries came up in discussion. I was told by students that my experiences and voice did not matter because I was a “twinky”- too whitewashed to understand these issues. An Asian

American being called a twinkie means that they are Asian (yellow) on the outside, but white (white cream filling) on the inside. Sometimes I would feel completely vulnerable and depressed from these types of dehumanizing comments, but other times I felt that this was a way of being accepted by white society: as not really Asian and as a member of the dominant group. An Asian American student with whom I worked as an administrator shared with me that she was one of two Asian Americans in a class and a white woman student told her she could be proud, but not too proud. Similarly, I battled with understanding why and how those in educational institutions could tell me how to feel about who I am as an Asian American. The educational institutions were not addressing racial and cultural differences at all, so the only acknowledgement of them was through racist individuals within the system.

I felt silenced and invisible on U.S. campuses in the south because of my experiences as a “twinky.” The following excerpt from Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* is a glimpse into my experience:

“When one is invisible he finds such problems as good and evil, honesty and dishonesty, of such shifting shapes that he confuses one with the other, depending upon who happens to be looking through him at the time” (p. 572).

Being invisible as an Asian American continued into graduate school. However, I was able to find a space to explore cultural milieus from a racial standpoint within an office of diversity. I took the opportunity to explore race in a predominantly African American and black space. As an Asian American student in the U.S., the lines between race and ethnicity blur because of how they intersect, although they are indeed different (Alvarez & Helms, 2001; Helms, 1990). Here, I examine race and racial identity development for Asian Americans in college to investigate additional moments of suffering.

Race in Higher Education

All three universities I have attended are PWIs in the south. Because of the PWI's histories, higher education there operates under whitewashed policies, curriculum, and epistemologies (Inwood & Martin, 2008). There is a racial crisis in U.S. higher education as more diverse students like myself occupy its spaces and find ourselves stuck in an oppressive system (Smith, Altbach & Lomotey, 2002). Race as it is treated in the U.S. has changed many perceived realities for people of color. As the anthropologist Robert Wald Sussman (2014) discussed,

“[Physical] Anthropologists have shown for many years now that there is no biological reality to human race...Given such clear scientific evidence as this and the research data of so many other biologists, anthropologists, and geneticists that demonstrate the nonexistence of biological races among humans, how can the “myth” of human race still persists?” If races do not exist as a biological reality, why do so many people still believe that they do?” (p. 2-8).

Sussman (2014) concludes that the concept of human race- and racism- is still a reality because it is within every aspect of our daily lives and culture. It permeates the social fabric of our society; understanding race and racism is a necessary educational endeavor relying on narration of experience from those who have been oppressed and discriminated against because of race. For people of color, a challenge of discussing diversity today is that we are living in a socially constructed era of “post-racial” colorblindness (Harper, 2012; Lewis, Chesler & Forman, 2000; Loo & Rolison, 1986). Shaun H. Harper's (2012) *Race without Racism: How Higher Education Researchers Minimize Racist Institutional Norms* highlights how scholars in U.S. higher education discuss race-related findings from their studies, concluding,

“I honestly believe that the overwhelming majority of higher education scholars whose research I analyzed for this study are authentically interested in narrowing racial gaps, diversifying college and university campuses, and doing research that informs the creation of environments that no longer marginalize persons of color. I am afraid, however, that these aims will not be achieved if we continue to study race without critically examining racism” (p. 25).

Consequently, higher education’s response to the racial crisis and the development of students of color still minimizes their experiences by not directly addressing racism. Institutional norms at PWIs (homogeneous student government, administrative staff, and faculty, to name a few) contribute to excluding racism and racial identity from programs meant to enhance development of college students’ experiences, leaving them unprepared to deal with a racist campus environment (Kim, 2012). Broadening our understanding of racial identity development in a racist institution is necessary in order to provide appropriate and purposeful support and services that can engage student of color to work through their untold experiences of racism (Andersen & Collins, 2015; Harper, Patton & Wooden, 2009; Ngo, 2006; Pope, 2000; Tatum, 1992; Wong, 1999).

Narrated Difference in Epistemologies of Ethnic and Racial Identity Development

Like ethnic identity development, racial identity development is rooted in social identity theory (Torres, 2011; Helms, 1990; Hogg, Terry & White, 1995). Although there are multiple similarities between ethnicity and race, it is too often that the two are lumped together (Alvarez & Helms, 2001; Fischer, 2007; Ngo, 2006; Torres, 2011). Torres, Howard-Hamilton, and Cooper’s (2003) *Identity Development of Diverse Populations: Implications for Teaching and Administration in Higher Education*, summarize ethnic and racial identity theories together

within diverse identity development theories. The narrated misconception of ethnic and racial identity contributes to the hegemonic discourses because the dominant group, those with power and authority, are privileged in not having to know the differences (Collins, 1989; Helms, 1990). Racial and ethnic identity each have their own distinct place within the discourse of diversity (Iwamoto & Liu, 2010). Borrowing from past researchers, Alvarez and Helms (2001) summarize the distinction as follows:

“racial identity refers to the quality of one's identification with one's racial group and emphasizes how individuals come to recognize and overcome the psychological and internalized effects of racial oppression. In contrast, ethnic identity refers to one's sense of identification with one's culture of origin based on a shared sense of cultural markers, such as history, traditions, language, and so on” (p. 218).

In 1994, Mary C. Waters provided an example through her research of second generation Black immigrants in New York City to show how one group was affected by racial oppression through a loss of ethnic, not racial, identity. Waters (1994) concludes:

“...the more socially mobile [black people] cling to ethnic identity as a hedge against one's racial identity. The less mobile blacks see little advantage to stressing an ethnic identity in the social worlds in which they travel, which are shared mostly with black Americans. Stressing an ethnic identity in that context risks being described as ‘acting white,’ being seen as rejecting the race and accepting the white stereotypes which they know through their everyday lives are not true” (p. 817).

Waters (1994) poignantly summarized a divisive and discriminatory system where ethnic and racial identities are in fact different and are used when convenient; whereas the marginalized are further marginalized by having to choose between ethnicity and race to fit into one's social group

(Du Bois, 1903). We must broaden our understanding between the two identities, and elaborate on the epistemologies of racial identity development in higher education.

Racial Identity Development in Higher Education

When discussing race in the U.S., much of the conversation still centers on the black/white paradigm, and college students' racial identity development is no different (Iijima, 1997; Perea, 1997; Helms, 1990; Hill & Thomas, 2000; White, 2002). However, scholars are disrupting this narrative for those occupying the liminal spaces of not being black or/and white in higher education (Delgado, 1997; Feagin, 2001; Hancock, 2007; Helms, 1995; Iglesias, 1998; Iijima, 1997; Kim, 1999; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Moran, 1997; Perea, 1998; Tamayo, 1995; Wu, 1995). Racial identity theories used in higher education currently include black, white, Asian American, Native American, Latino, biracial, and multiracial (Helms, 1990, 1995; Jones, Abes & Cilente, 2011).

Racial identity development theory for college students of color, like Cross's (1991) position on black identity theory, includes levels of awareness of one's race (Cross, 1971); that process is dynamic and lifelong (Thompson & Carter, 2013). Much of the research on racial identity development stems from Sue and Sue's (1990) expansion of minority identity development, which includes five progressive developmental stages: conformity, dissonance, resistance and immersion, introspection, and integrative awareness. Racial identity development is often discussed with multigroup ethnic and racial theories, because it does not provide specific insights into a particular group (Torres, Howard-Hamilton & Cooper, 2003). Furthermore, the five stages of racial identity development are discussed as fluid and generalizable, unable to address diversity within racial groups, such as divisions within Asian American college students, who are reported to be the most diverse racial group on U.S. campuses (Yeh & Huang, 1996).

As an Asian American, I was unaware of the diversity within the population until I was at KU and began to bring diverse Asian American students together. My previous professional experience working with diverse students focused predominantly on the African American population. Although the assistantship had its own challenges, there was precedent in place for how to support our African American students. My task of forming the Asian American student organization in that environment was challenging, because this was the first time an initiative was created to unite Asian American students at KU. As the only Vietnamese American to hold an administrative position at KU within my department, I had little guidance and had to go where there was support: the students. My first contact was a Vietnamese American student who was curious: he never imagined that someone who looked like him and spoke his language could occupy what he described as a “black” space. He was the president of the Vietnamese student organization on campus, which is one of the larger minority groups on campus. I was excited to learn more about the organization. He mentioned wanting to leave a legacy behind for all Asian American students at KU.

That student and I formed an Asian American student organization with executive members identifying as Vietnamese, Vietnamese American, Chinese American, Korean, Filipino, Japanese Korean Canadian, Chinese Japanese, Indian American, and Desi American. In previous years, Asian Americans on KU’s campus had created programs geared towards Asian international students (singular ethnic groups not associated with campus) and an Asian American cultural awareness program hosted by non-Asian administrators. The diversity office was considered the “black office,” by students and faculty. At times students would not trust me because of mistrust between Asian Americans and other groups (Kohatsu, et al., 2000). Many students expressed to me that the perception of the office as “the black office” had

deterred other racial groups from claiming the office as a space for them. Although the multicultural office advised student organizations from Hispanic/Latino, Asian, and other ethnic minorities, their participation was limited by a lack of on staff representation. Other than myself, all staff members were black. In addition, funding and allocation was nonexistent for other cultural groups. I once had to fight for allocations of \$75 for the Hispanic/Latino and Asian student groups in a budget meeting. At its root, the issue was not about funds or ethnic representation on staff: it was the inconsistent institutional support for racially diverse students, which pit ethnic groups against one another for the little funding the office offered. Resources allocated to marginalized groups have never been sufficient to address inequity in higher education. (Hurtado, Carter & Spuler, 1996).

Asian American college students at KU were not wrong that the office was only prepared to assist black students; epistemologies of racialized narratives there are undeniably centered on the black/white paradigm (Feagin, 2001; Kim, 1999; Perea, 1997, 1998). I remember having to cling to my identity and always remind people that I am Asian American, like when we had unit meetings, staff meetings, or casual conversations with colleagues, and comments like “us black folks,” created uncomfortable moments for me as I stated the obvious, that I was Asian American. During my second year in graduate school, a colleague responded with, “Eventually, you’ll have to pick a side Krystie... it will always be them versus us here.” I was surprised, as I had heard the exact same turn of phrase during my junior year at SU. In this type of environment, as an Asian American college student who has attended only PWIs in the south, my identity development is experienced through the black/white paradigm of racial identity development. My experiences as an Asian American college student were institutionally silenced. However, I think it is crucial to narrate the epistemologies of Asian American racial identity

development in order to help break the oppression faced by Asian American students, but ignored due to the black/white paradigm at PWIs in the south (Kiang & Kaplan, 1994; Kim, 1999; Moran, 1997; Tamayo, 1995). I no longer accept being silenced.

Narrated Epistemologies of Asian American Racial Identity Development

Like gender and ethnic identity development, our epistemologies on Asian American racial identity development for college students is limited (Alvarez & Helms, 2001; Chang, 2007; Chung, 2001; Kim, 1981; Torres, Howard-Hamilton & Cooper, 2003). Jean Kim's (1981) exploratory research on Asian American identity development, later renamed Asian American racial identity development (Kim, 2012), is a seminal source in which she studies the experiences of ten third-generation Japanese American women living in predominantly white society. Kim's (1981) Asian American racial identity development theory discusses five stages which includes: ethnic awareness, white identification, awakening to social political consciousness, redirection to Asian American consciousness, and incorporation. Kim's (2012) research explains how culture and race intersect during Asian American identity development. The most distinguishable trait Kim identifies as the socialization of hypersensitivity to group and social environments, also referred to as group orientation. The external influences family and white racism through European/American colonialism are also factors associated with group orientation. As Kim (2012) summarizes: "Asian people's view of themselves (*the private self*) is primarily influenced by what other people (*the public*), and particularly what a specific group of people (*the collection*) think of them" (p. 142). Because Asian Americans are highly influenced by external forces, group orientation contributes to white racism, which forces Asian Americans to acculturate to their social environment (Gim, Atkinson & Whiteley, 1990; Kim, 1981, 2012).

Asian Americans' adaptive acculturation shapes racial identity through experiences with racism and oppression unlike internally focused racial or ethnic groups (Kim, 2012). Asian Americans have seemed to react to racism differently. That difference can be examined in studies from some peer-reviewed sources that Asian Americans do not experience racism (Sue, et al., 2007). These type analyses deny Asian American experiences with racism, and further marginalize them into the liminal spaces outside of groups oppressed by racism (Hartlep, 2013). There is little psychological research on Asian American experiences with racism in college within the hundreds of studies published on the experience of people of color in college. The few Asian American studies that exist have found that there are psychological burdens from racism on Asian American identity (Alvarez, Juang & Liang, 2006). Scholars find that racism and acculturation create high levels of anxiety, depression, and other stresses for Asian Americans (Cress & Ikeda, 2003; Kohatsu, 1993). It does not come as a surprise that some scholars in the field of higher education are hesitant to apply racial identity development theories to Asian Americans when external factors such as group orientation are not considered in their development (Kim, 1981, 2012; Maekawa Kodama, McEwen, Liang & Lee, 2002). Although there are benefits to knowing and understanding different identity developments, the overgeneralization endemic in identity development theory is not the best fit and can be problematic for the research of Asian Americans.

The university is one microcosm of society; dissecting the epistemologies of certain constructed identities in higher education provides foundation to dissect the epistemologies of a large part of U.S. society. Understanding the epistemological implications of intersecting identities, I explore theoretical frameworks of intersectionality that would fit within the scope of

identity development for gender, ethnicity, and race on an individual, institutional, and cultural level to see how colleges and universities can better serve their Asian American college students.

Possible Theoretical Frameworks

Revisiting my research questions:

1. What are the causes of suffering in higher education?
2. How is that suffering experienced?
3. What are some sources of healing?

The review of epistemologies in higher education across intersections of gender, ethnic, and racial identity development theories show that each identity group has been suffering from sexism, xenophobia, and racism within society (and higher education). An autoethnographic approach investigated how suffering occurs, specifically as a first generation, immigrant, Vietnamese American woman within the walls of PWIs in the south. To explore nontraditional sources of healing for the systems that oppress, there are several theoretical frameworks that fit this research. Some of the theories explored include, model of multiple dimensions of identity (MMDI) (Jones, 1997; Jones & McEwen,), model of multiple dimensions of racial identity (MMDRI) (Jones, McEwen & Abes, 2007), critical social theory (CST) (Calhoun, 1995), critical race theory (CRT) (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991, 1995; Matsuda, 1987), and Asian Critical Race Theory (AsianCrit) (Chang, 1993). Among the theoretical frameworks explored, AsianCrit was the best fit for this study because it directly used historical context in law and the narrated experience of Asian Americans. Applying AsianCrit to the research provides a space for narrative inquiry on culture (an inward analyses) and addresses social systems and issues (an outward analyses). In addition to AsianCrit, I also employ a culturally relevant pedagogical and philosophical theoretical framework that addresses the need for nontraditional approaches to

current social issues: the Zen Buddhist Path, specifically Engaged Buddhism, which is an ontological tradition valuable for understanding socially constructed systems. Here, I present CRT to provide AsianCrit, an offshoot of CRT, context and theoretical foundation.

Critical Race Theory

Like the Civil Rights movement, CRT began as a movement in critical legal studies, some of its primary founders were women of color in law. CRT confronts the necessary steps to study and transform the relationships between race, racism, and power (Crenshaw, 1988, 1989, 1991, 1995; Matsuda, 1987). It utilizes economics, history, context, group self-interest, and intersectionality between multiple systems of oppressions to provide a broader perspective on issues including conventional civil rights and ethnic studies discourses (Crenshaw, 1995). CRT differs from the traditional civil rights movement because it focuses on the foundations of the liberal order rather than incrementalism and step-by-step processes (Chang, 1993, 1999). By analyzing equality theory, legal reasoning, Enlightenment rationalism, and constitutional principles, CRT is able to acknowledge the complexities of race, racism, and power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). According to Tara Yosso (2005) “CRT draws from and extends a broad literature base of critical theory in law, sociology, history, ethnic studies, and women’s studies” (p. 71), which allows CRT to contribute to intersectional work. Many disciplines have utilized tenets of CRT and vice versa; therefore, the genealogy of CRT has led to offshoots such as TribalCrit, FemCrit, LatCrit, and AsianCrit. Each offshoot provides insights to the theoretical framework. For example, the broad literature on Asian Americans in the U.S. and external factors for ethnic identity development, contextualizes their experiences based on socially constructed ideologies and racial tension (Hoang, 2015). The following is a narrated example of these ideologies and tension:

“I am Asian American. For many, the label “Asian American” can invoke simplistic and racist images of Geishas, kamikazes, tiger moms, martial artists, or socially awkward math nerds. Of course, the term “Asian American” embodies much more complexity than the term or these stereotypes that society attaches to it could ever reflect” (Museus, 2014, p. xi).

Accounts like Museus’(2008), embodying experienced and silenced racism from a social and cultural system of oppression, has paved the way for the acknowledgement of how Asian Americans needed a voice within CRT. Table 1 illustrates the various branches of CRT.

Asian Critical Race Theory

“Of the different voices in which I speak, I have been most comfortable with the one called silence. Silence allowed me to escape notice when I was a child. I could become invisible, and hence safe. Yet now I find myself leaving the safety of my silence” (Chang, 1993, p. 1244).

Many Asian Americans share Chang’s (1993) ideologies of silence as he expresses the beginning of his journey towards contributing to AsianCrit. This is a facet of some of our Asian American history, a history of silence by choice because of cultural norms and socialization in Asian American identity development (Kim, 1981). However, many Asian Americans have come to acknowledge that silence is not safety. Asian Americans have been historically oppressed by external social and cultural epistemologies (Takaki, 1993/2008). Deconstructing these epistemologies has early roots with Robert S. Chang (1993), one of the founding members of AsianCrit, also a scholar in law, who analyzed the position of Asian Americans within America's black/white racial paradigm *In Disoriented: Asian Americans, Law, and the Nation*. Chang (1999) posits that the Asian American “existence disrupts the comfortable binary of the

black/white racial paradigm in which the black racial subject is produced by and through its opposition to the white racial subject, and vice versa” (p. 11). In addition, *being* Asian American is also a disruption because *being* is to be present and acknowledged. One of the CRT tenets is to deconstruct ideologies. Another CRT tenet utilized by Chang (1999) for AsianCrit is to critically examine the biased subjectivity of race and ethnicity. Chang (1999) uses personal narrative, a controversial tenet in CRT, of becoming a Korean American to provide insight to the research for AsianCrit. As Wing (2001) summarizes:

Chang would quickly be identified as American in Korea due to his poor facility with the Korean language, among other factors. Ironically, his excellent command of English does not identify him as a native here either -- other Americans ask him where he is from, the implication being he could not be from the United States” (p. 1395).

Chang’s approach with storytelling confronts the silenced moments and issues of invisibility for Asian Americans- changing the socially constructed epistemology. He pushes AsianCrit beyond theory to praxis; the misconception of both Koreans and Americans of who is and who is not within their group is central to Chang’s Korean American identity. Storytelling is essential to AsianCrit because it provides the details of expert testimony to Asian American issues, as Wu (2002) explains,

“The common theme among these timely topics, and the expertise I am expected to bring to bear upon them, is an Asian American perspective. In other words, I supply the outlook of a person who is, -‘neither black nor white’” (p. 37).

If Asian Americans have been historically silenced through social and cultural systems based on their race and ethnicity, storytelling helps destroy the socially constructed epistemologies of Asian Americans, and correct the misconceptions formulated about them for the several hundred

years they have occupied U.S. soil. Storytelling is a tool for Asian Americans to disrupt the black/white racial paradigm.

Asian American scholars have produced literature as a call to address the racial binary using storytelling (Wing, 2007; Wu, 1995, 2003). Some examples in AsianCrit include Gary Okihiro's (2005) *Blacks and Asians in America: Crossings, conflict and commonality*, Janine Young Kim's (1999) "Are Asians Black?: The Asian American Civil Rights Agenda and the Contemporary Significance of the Black/White Paradigm," and Min Zhou's (2004) "Are Asian Americans becoming 'White?'" Within their story, these scholars postulate that Asian Americans are wedged as middlemen minorities in the black/white paradigm, oppressed by discrimination as well as absence of attention - societal ignorance and silence (Sue, et al., 2007). These epistemologies of Asian Americans being/acting black or white are an obstacle to liberating Asian Americans from racial oppression (Tamayo, 1995). One of the most prevailing socially constructed epistemologies deeply rooted in Asian American race and culture is the Model Minority Stereotype (MMS). I posit that these constructed epistemologies such as MMS create moments of suffering for Asian Americans.

Model Minority Stereotype

Tracing the origins of the MMS begins with an account from a white, male, sociology professor from the University of Berkeley, William Petersen, who wrote "Success Story, Japanese-American Style" which was published in 1966 in *The New York Times Magazine*. However, according to Hamamoto (1994), Petersen admitted not being qualified to write such a piece. Hamamoto indicates that "[s]hortly after the publication of 'The Negro Family,'" professor William Petersen was asked by the editor of *The New York Times Magazine* to write an article on a distinct racial group that also had suffered past discrimination yet did not seem troubled by a

breakdown in family life. The group happened to be Japanese Americans. Petersen himself admitted that he had little personal and absolutely no professional experience that qualified him to expound upon the subject matter, but he undertook the assignment nonetheless (Hamamoto, 1994, p. 64). His actions launched the stereotype of the MMS into common parlance in reference to how society discusses Asian Americans and our experiences. Since Petersen's publication in 1966 (commemorating 50 years of the MMS in 2016), the notion of the MMS has been used and/or reinforced by the media and scholars to harm the Asian American community.

The MMS is the belief that Asian Americans have achieved overwhelming economic and academic success through hard work, persistence, and following their cultural beliefs and norms; Asian Americans are believed to have "made it" and do not face the invisible barriers of racism pertaining to education, economic, social, or political issues (Chou & Feagin, 2008; Smith, Allen, et al., 2007; Smith, Hung, et al., 2011; Soto, Dawson-Andoh & BeLue, 2011; Bonazzo & Wong, 2007; Hartlep, 2013, 2014; Ng, Lee, et al., 2007; Wang, 1995; Wing, 2007; Wong, Lai, et al., 1998; Zhang, 2010). The University of Texas at Austin provided other examples of the MMSs which includes:

1. smart, especially in STEM
2. wealthy
3. hard-working, self-reliant, living "the American dream"
4. docile and submissive, obedient and uncomplaining
5. spiritually enlightened
6. never in need of assistance (<http://cmhc.utexas.edu/modelminority.html>)

These stereotypes create a conundrum, as Teranishi, Behringer, Grey and Parker (2009) provocatively asked, "Is there something bad about a positive stereotype?" in order to

deconstruct how positive stereotypes negatively affect the Asian American population (p. 57). Historically, Asian Americans did not always have positive stereotypes. In early Asian American history, anti-Chinese propaganda during the 1800s created the xenophobic stereotype of yellow peril, which constructed epistemologies of Asians being untrustworthy and a menace to the U.S. (Kawai, 2005; Wu, 1982). After several centuries in the U.S., the epistemology of yellow peril still exists, and have been reclaimed during the yellow peril for Black Power movement during the Civil Rights era (Marchetti, 1994).

The constructed concepts of yellow peril (that Asians are a threat and should not be trusted) and the model minority (Asians are all successful) are both systematic forms of oppression for Asian Americans in the U.S. (Kawai, 2005). As Natsu Taylor Saito (1997) posits in his article “Model Minority, Yellow Peril: Functions of Foreignness in the Construction of Asian American Legal Identity,” even though the MMS is considered by many to be a “positive” stereotype, elements of the MMS can be read as components of “yellow peril,” and society can bounce between the two labels without dealing with the real issue of Asian American racial discrimination (p. 71). Both yellow peril and the MMS reinforce false assumptions about being Asian American. Members of this community continue to be silenced victims, whether the stereotype makes them outcasts or well-off in U.S. society. These assumptions provide justification for the community to be given lesser standards of support and protection. Teranishi, Behringer, Grey and Parker’s (2009) question, “Is there something bad about a positive stereotype?” is driving at the question, “Can a stereotype ever be positive?” Research conducted by Kay, Day, Zanna and Nussbaum (2013) found that positive stereotypes are more challenging to dispel because they avoid detection when compared to their more negative counterparts. As I

navigate the university, developing my identity through the lenses of society and family in college, it is clear to see that positive stereotypes also cause suffering.

The Paradox of the Model Minority Stereotype: The Source of Suffering

As Wu (2003) notes, the MMS is a difficult issue because of its positive connotations; however, stereotypes are socially constructed to overgeneralize and ultimately, marginalize the affected group, even if the stereotypes appear positive at the outset. The MMS suggests that Asian Americans are academic superstars with high GPAs and SAT/ACT scores, excelling in perceivably more challenging subjects in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). The MMS also suggests negative assumptions: that Asian Americans are awkward, lacking in social skills, and submissive, or, as Bow (2010) describes, performing the “humble Oriental” role as part of the MMS (p. 129). These anti-Asian American stereotypes also include being bad drivers, Kung Fu fighters, and sexual objects (Wu, 1982). When applying the MMS in how we support our Asian American college students, it is important to acknowledge that Asian American students have been made invisible and continue to be tokenized by myths of not facing academic hardships or challenges (Teranishi, 2012). The perception of Asian Americans’ academic success in higher education excludes members of this group from needed academic and social support systems.

“This country perpetuated a myth once [the MMS]. Today, no one can afford to dreamily chase after that gold in the streets [the American dream], oblivious to the genuine treasure of racial equality. When racism persists, can one really call any minority a “model?” (Chang, 1998, p. 373).

The “myth” Chang (1998) refers to is the model minority myth stereotypes (Hartlep, 2011, 2013, 2014; Chou & Feagin, 2008). These myths create moments of suffering for many Asian

American students battling with this myth while being silenced, matching my own college experiences at PWIs in the south (SuSUKi, 2002).

My experiences with racism and oppression did not start in college, but actually began in Vietnam when certain family members would make negative and racist comments towards the people of Cambodia for being less than Vietnamese people because they were darker and perceived as less educated (Bates, 1996). However, it was not until I enrolled at SU that my understanding of racism was formulated through the black/white paradigm at PWIs in the south because I was institutionally exposed to racism (Perea, 1997). The black/white paradigm created moments where I have personally asked Gary Okihiro's (1994) question: "Is Yellow Black or White?," while going through Kim's (1981/2012) second stage of Asian American racial identity development: white identification. I read that Asian Americans are neither black nor white (Wu, 2003), but experienced being accused of becoming white (Min Zhou, 2004), and acting black (Yancey, 2003) and often witnessed Asian Americans occupying the liminal spaces of the black/white paradigm (Kim, 1999). I felt invisible when I realized I was neither black nor white and there was potentially no space for me in society. I continue to suffer at SU because of the MMS construct and not fitting into the spaces which were created by southern black/white paradigm.

In a study to deconstruct the MMS, Museus and Kiang (2009) explain that MMS contributes to the reality of Asian American students feeling invisible in higher education. In another study, Museus (2008) compares the MMS with the inferior minority myth that black students are underachievers, and posit that both these stereotypes affect Asian American and black students negatively in reference to their campus climate, learning environment, and retention. As a Vietnamese American woman, I am often put into situations where I have to

justify myself as being a minority and being a professional in the academy. I remember my first semester as a doctoral student and my first experience trying to publish something with another faculty member. The passage below is an email from the faculty member on my first attempt at writing about my experience with racism, and an example of academic suffering because of the MMS myths:

“I am providing comments on about two thirds of the manuscript. I did not complete the last portion as I think you need to reframe the chapter...you are showing things happened but you are making big leaps from what you experienced to race. When describing the rosary incident I don't know that is race at all — I am sure it might have been but it could have been lots of other things...”

As a novice scholar, I am sure the manuscript needed a lot of help, but I know what I experienced, and it *was* racism. However, these comments negate my experience, especially when they wrote, “I don’t know that is race at all.” I felt silenced, as if my experience did not matter, invalidated as a minoritized individual. Coincidentally, I was working with a black doctoral student who was also writing a manuscript for the same book. His experience with overt racism was well received by the faculty member. I believe that MMS ideologies silenced my experience because “model minorities” do not experience racism, especially because it was not overt. The black doctoral student expressed that their chapter was not necessarily better than mine, but maybe the faculty member was looking for a story with a “nigger” incident. In some ways, their words did console me because the faculty’s response to my experience did make me question whether my narrative was legitimate. A few months later, my chapter never received any additional edits, but my title was used for the black doctoral student’s chapter that did get published. My experience seemed not good enough to publish, not good enough to receive help,

and not good enough to even be acknowledged. I felt guilty that my experiences were not worthy enough or valuable enough compared to the overt racism experienced by my cohort member. I have come a long way since that first semester as a doctoral student. I was silenced and remain silent about many of my past experiences with oppression, but I have come to the reality that I can no longer be silent on being silenced (Cochran-Smith, 1995; Lawrence, 1995; Lopez, 2010; Wise, 2013). I must continue telling my stories.

The researched epistemologies of Asian Americans contribute to the methodology of AsianCrit through storytelling. Scholars have used the method of using reflexive voice in their research as an educational practice of deconstructing existing knowledges and paving the path for unknowing. This allows the process of to be and to let be foster in Asian American students. Consciously or unconsciously, I posit that AsianCrit is applying philosophies of the Zen Buddhist Path, particularly of Engaged Buddhism, which practices two tenets: mindfulness and interbeing. AsianCrit weaves narratives of Asian American oppression by dissecting law and creating awareness toward Asian American issues (mindfulness). At the same time, it relates experiences to other marginalized communities through intersectional discussion of oppressions (interbeing).

Breathing Ontologies of the Zen Buddhist Path: Engaged Buddhism

One of Hanh's (1991) masterful works, *Old Path, White Clouds: Walking in the Footsteps of the Buddha*, presents the experiences of Buddha and his teachings in a political and sociocultural context. Hanh's interpretation of Buddhist philosophy interconnects practice and teaching through the Three Jewels: the Buddha (you, the student, and your faith), the Dharma (teachings/actions/virtues), and the Sangha (the community) (Hanh, 1998) as well as the Four Noble Truths: 1) suffering is a part of life 2) we must find the sources of these sufferings 3) there

is an end to suffering if we forgo desire, ill will, and ignorance 4) the end of suffering is contained in the Eightfold Path (right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right concentration, and right mindfulness) (Hanh, 1998). Hanh's praxis of The Three Jewels and Four Noble Truths emerged as Engaged Buddhism during civil unrest in the world with the Vietnam War and Civil Rights Movement. Engaged Buddhism was a movement which called for social interbeing through transformative nonviolence (King, 2005; Queen, 2000). Through the practice of Engaged Buddhism, one seeks to apply the teachings and practices of the Zen Buddhist path through social, political, environmental, and economic movements to liberate and transform ourselves and our community. We must engage as active participants of whatever space we occupy during whatever time we live (Queen & King, 1996). For me, that includes being a practitioner and scholar in higher education fighting for resources and demystifying the stereotypes that harm Asian American college students. I have practice in being an active participant of Engaged Buddhism, one of the first people to influence me is my paternal grandmother, Grandmother Le.

Grandmother Le was born in 1912, and witnessed the concept of Engaged Buddhism emerge and transform Vietnam. The first lesson within Engaged Buddhism that was taught to me was when I traveled back to Vietnam in 1997 to celebrate her 85th birthday. I shared with Grandmother Le how much I disliked having to learn a new language, customs, and traditions of a country I did not understand. In this visit, she shared with me the following:

“Kindness will drive out your feeling of indifference, kindness is love. You have to know that difference is okay, it is not there to threaten who you are, but to strengthen your self-awareness. Just remember the 4,000 years of Vietnamese history, 1,000 years of Chinese invasion, 100 years of French rule, and 20 years of homeland turmoil. Look to our

language to understand compassion and mindfulness when you learn about Americans and their customs. Our language is complicated because you have to see its blends and blotches: Vietnamese roots, Chinese words, and French alphabet. It is all related. I never learned English or knew Americans in America, but I know it does not have 4,000 years of difference, they only have 400 years. If you truly love how different we are as Vietnamese folks, you will learn to love how different they are as Americans.”

My grandmother’s words resonate with me now as I take concepts from the Three Jewels and Four Noble Truths and apply them to the academy: the students and teachers (Buddha), the curriculum (Dharma), and the university (Sangha). Translated into “it is all related,” from Vietnamese to English, my grandmother was referring to one of the tenets of interbeing while she was teaching me how to co-exist with suffering and discrimination in the U.S. (Hanh, 2007; Queen, Prebish & Keown, 2003). Engaged Buddhism has allowed me to look at other concepts within Zen Buddhist philosophies such as compassion and mindfulness to guide how I approach this research study.

Hanh’s (1998) Engaged Buddhism uses concepts of compassion and mindfulness to deconstruct dualism and present the liberatory idea of interbeing when faced with the suffering of difference (Asher, 2003; 2007; Lorde, 2007/1984; Robins, 2010). I adopt the philosophy of Engaged Buddhism, and translate it to the academy as “engaged research/er” through the critical lens of AsianCrit. I acknowledge that moments of suffering in college led me to feel alienated, disconnected, and isolated. As both AsianCrit and the Zen Buddhist path value storytelling, through the qualitative methodology of autoethnography, I research these sufferable moments. In the next chapter, I present my methodology.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

It is an unsettling feeling to live through moments of suffering, recount them, and then be authentic and vulnerable enough to tell the stories in an academic context. In the process of telling stories about sufferable moments and reviewing existing literature, I realized that being a first generation, immigrant, and Vietnamese American woman attending PWIs in the south region of the U.S. is to experience vulnerability. I have come had conversations with other Asian Americans who have believe it is a choice if we let things “bother” us, and therefore, if I can just ignore the issues, I would not feel so vulnerable. It is to experience being silenced and made invisible, then be told my feelings are not valid by those in-group members that continues to render me vulnerable. To participate as an Asian American scholar can deepen these wounds; one must reflect and relive in order to be heard and made visible. I must engage in remembering to not stray away from the struggle. I have woken up in sweats from nightmares reliving my past experiences. For example, I once fell asleep while writing my dissertation, and had to relive the invalidation from my first experience trying to publish with a professor. I was berated by the professor because I was not writing in a fashion “scholarly enough” for them. They yelled “stupid girl,” screamed “your experiences are trivial,” and pushed my face into a stack of books while whispering, “you will never succeed in the academy.” Reliving does not stop when one wakes up; it becomes ubiquitous within the day to day. One’s subconscious is capable of reliving past pains and making demons out of those who played a role in suffering. I woke up in a panic and looked around me. I began practicing breathing meditation to bring me back to the present. Remembering words of wisdom helps calm my nerves:

“Life is filled with suffering, but it is also filled with many wonders, like the blue sky, the sunshine, the eyes of a baby. To suffer is not enough. We must also be in touch with

wonders of life. They are within us and all around us, everywhere, any time (Hanh, 1987, p.4).

I went back to writing my dissertation with the understanding that in order to begin healing, I must continue to research and write to liberate myself as an academic while in the academy.

Methodology

After reviewing the literature, I am choosing to conduct a critical Zen autoethnography as my methodology. To date, this methodology has not been done by any scholar in any field in any English or translated English research. To create critical Zen autoethnography, I posit that in order to confront the reality of sufferable moments as a marginalized scholar, I must write about how society and culture has influenced my experiences on the margins (critical). The purpose is to share stories about experiences of suffering in higher education for the past decade from the perspective of a first generation, immigrant, Vietnamese American woman educated at PWIs in the south (autoethnography). As Hancock, Allen, and Lewis (2015) explains,

“The reality of invisibility and silence has plagued marginalized scholars in their attempt to make known the cultural significance found in the planning and execution of autoethnographic research” (p. 3).

Thus, creating a reality of visibility and voice in marginalized groups is tantamount to researching, writing, and publishing using narratives from our own experiences. Daly (2007) postulates that, “... as students of lived experience, we are presented with an endless supply of emerging realities (p.5). My realities are shaped by my experiences in higher education, and they are utilized as researchable moments. In addition, I employ Zen Buddhist philosophies in this research as a way to heal and liberate (Zen) myself and potentially others in the academy. Similar to Linda Smith’s (1999/2012) *Decolonizing Methodologies- Research and*

Indigenous peoples, using non-traditional, non-western approaches, such as the philosophies and practices of Zen Buddhist path, the methodology of interbeing is meant to deconstruct the hierarchy of scholarly product and insert principles of mindfulness in educational research. I will further elaborate and dissect critical Zen autoethnography in later sections.

Research Design

I propose a qualitative research for my study using narratives. As Connelly and Clandinin (1990) explain, “narrative is situated in the matrix of qualitative research” (p. 3). There are no measurable variables or statistical analyses critical to my research questions, and therefore, quantitative research would be insufficient. Furthermore, this study does not incorporate reproducible results; the specific circumstances of the subject are not meant to be generalized. The research is meant to provide context in which higher education institutions could address the suffering of marginalized student groups in more mindful ways.

It is apparent that there is inequitable suffering among marginalized groups within the walls of the university; with that as a given, my research questions are:

1. What are the causes of suffering for me in higher education?
2. How was it experienced?
3. What are some sources of healing?

Creswell (2014) explains that, “Qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 4). Suffering is a social and individual issue, which is seldom explored regarding how it affects higher education students. Qualitative research emphasizes phenomena from an insider’s perspective (Creswell, 2012, 2014, Daly, 2007; Denzin, 2010; Denzin & Lincoln, 2010). Thus, qualitative research is the best fit for studying personal accounts of sufferable moments in higher

education as it will require deep and critical reflection and understanding (Lapan, Quartaroli & Riemer, 2012). I am reminded that as long as we have existed, storytelling exists as a vehicle of inquiry (Minh-Ha, 1997). To share and reflect on these stories of my reality, I employ the research design of narrative inquiry, which allows me to look at multiple realities at their intersection of my identity and its development (Clandinin 2006; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, Puchor & Orr, 2007; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Reisman, 2008).

Research Approach

All the research approaches capable of addressing my research questions has elements of storytelling, including case study, narrative inquiry, and ethnography. Narrative inquiry was chosen because it was not possible to fully explore the research questions without complex narratives of experience. While exploring and sampling different research designs, I debated on whether it would be appropriate to tell my story, because I had so much self-doubt and mixed emotions regarding my own identity. I did not want to relive moments of suffering and struggle, but I did want to be authentic in delivering the story of marginalized Asian American experience in higher education. Narrative inquiry is an act of critically interpreting stories, a practice that has been impactful in shaping who I am. Being Vietnamese for me was composed of oral histories passed down from generation to generation. I remember listening to both my grandmothers tell me stories of our ancestors and our ontology of 4,000 years and beyond (Hanh, 2007). I recognize that my existence is shaped through these remembered stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). My exposure to Thich Nhat Hanh, who I consider to be a Zen autoethnographer, influenced my decision to continue the tradition of Vietnamese Zen autoethnography. Our stories might be written differently, but it is with the same breath because we are interconnected through stories and legends from Vietnam (Hanh, 2007). As an

autoethnographic researcher, much of Hanh's (1987, 1991, 1999, 2007) work is through the lens of the Four Noble Truths:

1. Dukkha: Acknowledging that suffering exists
2. Samudaya: Search for the cause(s) of suffering
3. Nirodha: Believe that there is an end to our suffering
4. Magga: Apply the 8 Fold Path (right view, right intentions, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right Samadhi- meditation) – emphasis of mindfulness at the center of the 8 Fold Path

Although I came to the decision to use critical Zen autoethnography, there was still a hint of doubt because I had mixed messages from colleagues and mentors about narrative research. I took on the challenge of reading Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) *Narrative Inquiry*. The first paragraph indicated that it was appropriate to investigate oneself using narrative inquiry:

“Our starting point for this book is our own inquiry into teaching and teacher knowledge.

In the past three decades, we have been positioned in different places and in different story lines on the educational landscape... our questions, our research puzzles, have focused around the board questions of how individuals teach and learn, of how temporality (placing things in the context of time) connects with change and learning, and of how institutions frame our lives” (p. 1).

I recognized the intricacies of how the institution of higher education has framed my life, just as much as the stories from my grandmothers. As Clandinin & Connelly (2000) posit from the foundation of John Dewey and Clifford Geertz,

“experience is a key term in these diverse inquiries” (p. 2) and *“Change-* change in the world, change in the inquiry, change in the inquirer, change in the point of view, change in the outcomes- is what [is noticed] upon reflection” (p. 6).

The Four Noble Truths and the two specific tenets of narrative inquiry, experience and change upon reflection, provide the basis for my research study to explore my experiences and how I make meaning out of those experiences.

In articulating my stories, I am influenced by social interpretivist (going beyond questions that can be solved by verified data received from the senses), to seek to understand the spaces in which we work and live (Creswell, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) postulates that researchers’ stories are, “coming at different times and in different places, embedded within the larger story of educational research” (p. xxv). It is appropriate to adopt a qualitative methodological approach of critical autoethnography for the purpose of this study (Creswell, 2012; 2013; Mertens, 2014; Newman & Benz, 1998; Sale, Lohfeld, & Brazil, 2002). As a method of narrative inquiry, autoethnography is an appropriate approach for research when the study involves the analysis of personal experience as a means to understand cultural experience (Spry, 2001; Adams & Jones, 2011; Ellis, 2004; Jones, 2005) and uses both doctrines of autobiography, (Denzin, 1989, Ellis & Bochner, 1992), and ethnography, (Geertz, 1973; Goodall, 2001; Mason, 2002) to conduct the study.

Autoethnographers research themselves in relation to others (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014). It is both a method and a product of research and writing using personal lived experiences in relations to culture (Chang, 2008; Ellis, 2004; Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). Inversely, culture was created from lived experiences (Berry, 2012). As Boylorn and Orbe (2014) explain, “autoethnography is a method that allows for both personal and cultural critique...because

people's lives and ideologies are influenced by multiple cultural dimensions and relationships.” (p. 17).

Critical Zen autoethnography sees culture as historically situated and socially constructed, using personal experiences as both the method and product of research and writing (Adams, 2005; 2008; Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011) “as a means to enhance existing understanding of lived experiences enacted within social locations situated within larger systems of power, oppression, and social privilege” (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014, p. 19). Furthermore, this is an autoethnography of interbeing, defined in chapter one and two as being in touch with, continuing, realizing, and making it here and now. Interbeing in the academy means being in touch with its histories, continuing to research, realizing that suffering exists from its histories and research, and observe the present with those epistemologies of the academy. Sister Dang Nghiem (2010), my spiritual mentor and student of our Zen Master, Thich Nhat Hanh, shared with the world that “Our stories are not only ours, they belong to our ancestors and our descendants” (p. 146). Employing a critical autoethnography of interbeing and a critical theoretical framework of AsianCrit will aid in my attempt to deconstruct the existing epistemologies of higher education by revealing ways power has been embedded with in and out of its walls of the university (Lapan, Quartaroli & Riemer, 2012). Employing the methods of interbeing will help reveal how we hurt and how others hurt: how we have suffered and how others have suffered. In addition, critical autoethnography goes beyond traditional ethnographic approaches because it reveals the “cultural nuances of race, power, and politics and other factors that impact the lived experiences of the [researcher]” (Hancock & Allen, 2015, p. 8).

Hancock's (2015) “Your Inquiry is *Not* Like Mine: Structuring a Critical Constructivist Approach to Autoethnographic Inquiry,” provides insight into how there is no singular formula

for conducting an autoethnography and as a researcher and a participant of the research, we must know our disposition. Hancock (2015) believes that autoethnographers create their own ontological process that will guide the interpretation and representation of the lived experiences. Thus, as an autoethnographic researcher, I situate my research within the following critical lenses: I identify as a member of multiple marginalized group: first generation, immigrant, Vietnamese American woman. I examine my lived experiences in college from 2006 and forward with the recollections of past experiences that influenced my time in college. Locating these lived experiences within the context of PWIs in the south: my undergraduate institution at SU and my graduate institution at OU, as well as living in two southern states and Bien Hoa, Vietnam.

Limitations on Researching and Doing Critical Zen Autoethnography

While I am privileged in this space of research to conduct an autoethnography using myself as the subject, I do have some concerns with what that might entail outside of the methodological, theoretical, and philosophical aspects of the research. As I prepare to question myself as the researcher and the researched subject (Meloy, 2001), and take the research as an inward journey of self-discovery (Mason, 2002), I understand change is inevitable for me (Geertz, 1973). Anticipating the future and the changes to come, I limit myself in how I tell the stories because there are conflicted selves, one of being authentic and trusting the process, and the ego self-wanting to control the process. Studying the self has limitations from us limiting our own resources. There is a potential of not liking what I find during the journey or never finding the interbeing in the academy.

Another concern is time. There are only 24 hours in a day, and when deadlines become concrete, time restraint is a huge concern (Lapan, Quartaroli & Riemer, 2012). Not only does

time become a factor in writing, the doctoral process is so lonely and isolating that living in one's mind becomes extremely dangerous (Mercer, Kythreotis et al., 2011; Owler, 2010). The feeling of loneliness and isolation creeps up out of nowhere and it is always concerning when those feelings turn into defeat- ultimately the idea of not finishing worsens and panic attacks are the results of these scary thoughts. However, conducting a critical Zen autoethnography is to have lived experiences and record them- therefore, it is necessary for me to continue to write while I continue to gather lived experiences of being Asian American in the southern region of the U.S.

The concerns above stem from self-doubt; therefore, I choose to see them as ways to challenge myself while I am embarking on this doctoral journey. The challenge is to acknowledge and work on what Gardner and Holley (2011) call, "the invisible barriers" for first generation students of color through their doctoral education. I have been socialized in society as a high achieving minority woman through the MMS, but also to doubt myself relentlessly, and these lessons are reinforced in the academy (Allen, 1995). I developed the "imposter syndrome," where I am unable to internalize my accomplishment and fear that society will "figure me out," and consequently, am overcome with fear of failure (Ewing, Richardson, et al., 1996; Gardner & Holley, 2011; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Gibson-Beverly & Schwartz, 2008). I constantly question myself and what I know. I deliberately not ask for help because if I do, I fear that others will perceive me as "not ready," "not good enough," and "not worthy." One of the biggest eye-opening moments in this process was not passing my first general exam. I felt exposed. In this moment of vulnerability, I found strength in knowing that I am not an imposter, and demands of perfectionism only further illustrates the oppressive thought of not valuing who I am currently. If I am imperfect and sometimes fail, my acknowledgement of who I am allows me to grow and not

to operate in fear. Many minority doctoral students struggle with finding support throughout their program (Gardner & Holley, 2011), fortunately, I do find myself being supported by caring faculty and staff at the university. I believe I am learning that certain participants in the academy do value people where they are, who they are, and what they bring. That includes all my committee members. More importantly, that includes me. I value where I am, who I am, and what I bring to the academy much more now than before as I continue on with the dissertation process.

Confronting Traditional Qualitative Research

Conducting an autoethnography created many moments of crisis for me. Reviewing the literature showed these moments of crisis in research replicate other crisis of lived experiences presented in autoethnography, and the researcher is not immune to these crisis. As Denzin and Connelly (2008) summarized, the three crisis in autoethnography is representation, legitimation, and praxis. In order to deal with these moments of crisis, I had to step out of traditional methods of qualitative research, not completely, but enough to unlearn the constricting knowledges of how one *must* conduct their research. I confront traditional qualitative research by not limiting myself on what is *data* in response to representation, but do forgo validation techniques, because the chosen researcher moments will be conducted with thick description for legitimation (Geertz, 1981), nor will I include research bias, or validity because all text are bias and there is validation necessary in the process of autoethnography, which is rooted in being and experiences. Reviewing existing autoethnographies provided a foundation in how I wanted to conduct the research, but no one scholar held to a standard, or a tradition, of doing an autoethnography. Adams and Ellis (2014) provides a method of an autoethnography which includes:

1. Autobiographical- writing on epiphanies, about past experiences
2. Ethnographic- writing on culture studied, through participant observation
3. The autoethnographer retrospectively and selectively writes about meaningful experiences- epiphanies- that are made possible by being part of a culture and from possessing a particular cultural identity
4. Analyze these epiphanies by comparing them to existing research, interviewing other with similar epiphanies, and interrogate the meaning of the experiences
5. Rewrite about epiphanies and consider ways other scholars have described their experience with similar epiphanies

Data Collection

In *Autoethnography as a Lighthouse: Illuminating Race, Research, and the Politics of Schooling*, Hancock and Allen (2015) uses the metaphor of a lighthouse for how autoethnography can illuminate critical social issues of marginalized identities.

“As the lighthouse illuminates waterways to help navigate maritime vessels, autoethnography can illuminate pathways to understanding the nuanced ramifications of race, gender, and identity on research and school politics. Similar to the purposes and functions of a lighthouse, which are to guide, warn, and help, autoethnography does the same for not only the author but also the reader” (Hancock & Allen, 2015, p. 8).

Here, I suggest a similar approach to data collecting for my autoethnographic work using the lighthouse metaphor. Many travelers come and leave their mark, whether writing about their experience, taking a picture, leaving footsteps, it serves as a physical space of collected artifacts. Autoethnography helps us recount all those artifacts, lived experiences, remembered moments

that has left their mark. Like other research methodology, the data I collect here is a representation of what is meaningful, but furthermore, for an autoethnography, it is the representation of who me and my culture (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008).

The data collected for this autoethnographic research contain artifacts of my life: journals from the past decade, novels, letters, speeches, notes, meeting agendas, interviews, reflexive journal entries (written reflections on past events), academic papers, emails, poems, notes on photos, and reflexive memories and conversations. With technology, written data are all electronically stored. They were collected through the span of my 29 years of my being. Through the data I have collected, I identify three narratives (numeric) with specific moments (alphabetical) that caused me suffering in higher education:

1. My experience at SU as an undergraduate in history and education.
 - a. The racist, xenophobic, and discriminatory aspects that continued in having a name in the U.S. as an Asian American, and how changing my name did not change my experiences (Reflexive journal entries, conversations, and interviews with friends, family, and colleagues).
 - b. Reuniting with my birth family and the conflicts between being Asian and American (journal entries, interviews with my mom and sisters, text messages, emails, and phone conversations).
2. My experience at KU as a master's and doctoral student
 - a. Being homeless during my master's program and experiencing being silenced and victimized during Keb's death (emails, text messages, meeting agenda, notes, conversations, and journal entries).

b. My experience at KU as a doctoral student and working full time in a diversity office and becoming “black” in the south (novels, letters, speeches, notes, meeting agendas, interviews, reflexive journal entries (written reflections on past events), academic papers, emails, poems, reflexive memories, and conversations).

c. When a white male faculty member saw me as the Model Minority who could not have experienced racism (emails, papers, and journal entries).

I have identified these specific experiences as sufferable moments dealing with sexism, racism, xenophobia, and overgeneralized epistemologies of Asian Americans in college. I will analyze one specific narrative in my data analysis section, and will present my findings in chapter four. There are many other silenced narratives, but as time can be a constraint for a qualitative researcher (Creswell, 2012), I chose the most provocative stories to tell in an effort to become unsilenced and find sources of healing through research.

Participants

Autoethnography privileges me to be the researcher and the subject (Bochner & Ellis, year; Chang, 1993; Duncun, 2008; Ellis, 2004; Holman, 2005). As the participant, I would like to disclose that my birth name is Thuong Le, after my family moved to southern Vietnam, we changed our last names to acculturate with southern Vietnamese culture, and as I mentioned in chapter one, after I moved to college as a freshman, I changed my first name to Krystie to acculturate with Southern American culture. Here lies the difference between Le-Nguyen switch and Thuong-Krystie switch. I am proud to be a Nguyen, and no one has ever challenged my family or me on its legitimacy. I am proud to be a Krystie, a name given to me by my older sister, but I am constantly asked, what is your *real* name? Interestingly, this question is asked by all, both Asians and Americans and every nationality in between. I am 30 years old. I constantly

get carded at the movies, get comments that I am mature for my age, and be reminded of my Asian heritage whenever my age is discussed. I have struggled with self-identifying my ethnicity and race ever since I was adopted into my Irish American family when I was 12 years old. As mentioned in chapter 2, I know my family loves me, and wanted me to be accepted and embraced, but disconnecting me from who I am, the erasure of my ethnicity and race, like the university, forgetting about where I came from and the lived experiences I bring with me, caused me great suffering. However, reconnecting with my birth family during my undergraduate years and losing Keb in 2011, I have identified myself as Vietnamese American. My birth family brought meaning to what I was experiencing- my epistemology. Losing Keb brought me to reconnect with being Vietnamese, my ontology. Losing Keb made me feel like I was losing a part of my heritage and culture, one less person to relate to on this earth. As I desperately try to cling onto whatever still exists to bring me back home to Keb, I continue to cultivate an interbeing type of relationship with my family and heritage.

As my inner journey begins with storytelling, my interest in studying the identities of who I am as a first generation, immigrant, and Asian American woman led me to be the subject of my study. Because no other participants were included, I was not required by Louisiana State University to submit an application of research to the Institutional Review Board.

Data Analysis

As mentioned above, my data analysis will cover general themes of suffering and process through tenets of Zen Buddhist path of mindfulness and interbeing as sources of healing. Each narrative is explored in chapter four where I continue the dialogue with those who have passed. My story here begins with starting my Master's program. Below is a conversation with my mother.

Mother Nguyen: “We all need to sit down and talk. We need to listen to each other. We are family.”

Me: “I agree, but I don’t want them to pity me. They see me as an outsider you know.”

Mother Nguyen: “Your sisters might see you as that, but you are not that. Let them see you for you, how you’ve changed, how you’re still the same. You think it was easy for them to see you go? It wasn’t. They always tell me I made a mistake in letting another family adopt you, do you think that is seeing you as an outsider? Maybe you see yourself as an outsider, as someone who wants to take back all the time we didn’t get to be together. You might look differently and say different words, but you’re still my daughter, and they are still your sister. They will help. If they don’t help, then they have betrayed who they are as my daughters and your sister.”

Me: “Mom. Were you ever mad at me for leaving?”

Mother Nguyen: “Never.”

Me: “Are you disappointed in me for putting myself in this situation?”

Mother Nguyen: “I sometimes am disappointed in myself for letting this American society break us down to the point where one of my children had to leave the family- or be taken away more like it [Her face is stern, but there is something in her tone that sounds broken]. I was a single mother of three small girls and I made it work. We made it work. We had each other. I never knew coming to the U.S. would cause all of us to break apart. Yes, I am thankful for all of our success... [She trails off. She seems like she was trying to convince herself to believe this to be true. She rolled her eyes and puckered her lips. It is a body gesture I know well. She does not believe what she just said]. But, yeah, I am disappointed in myself sometimes that you’re in this situation. I thought that is what we left behind us in Vietnam.”

Me: “What do you mean?”

Mother Nguyen: “Starving. Homelessness. Poverty! You don’t starve in the U.S., especially not us Asians. It is not expected of us to starve. They expect us to succeed you know. I mean, I expect you to succeed to, but when you don’t, you know I’m here. I’m here for you now. When we first came to the U.S. we struggled with one income for five people, but it’s nothing like what you’re going through right now.”

This was part of the conversation I had with mother Nguyen when I informed her of being homeless in college. I packed my car and left North Carolina with less than \$200 in my pocket. I had left my adopted family, the Shaughnessys, and was moving to Louisiana for graduate school. I stopped talking to my adopted family because my oldest sister-in-law gave my family an ultimatum: it was either her or me. We did not get along. She came down to North Carolina from New York because my family moved down North Carolina to live near me after my father passed away. I think she always resented me for making her leave her family and home. I do not blame her resentment. After she married into the family, she continued to remind everyone that I am an adult, code for the adoption ended at 18 years old, and my family does not have to take care of me anymore. Father Shaughnessy would never let her say something so nasty to me, let alone give my family the ultimatum. But after my father passed away, we were all lost. He was the glue that held us all together. I chose to leave before my family made the decision because I felt a lot of self-pity at the time. Keb had moved back to California and lost was inevitable for me. No one discouraged me from leaving, or asked me to stay, which after five years of reflection, still hurts.

Mother Nguyen and I started communicating again during freshman year. For five years, we called each other every day. Our conversations were surface level at first, but it was the severed ties with the Shaughnessy that brought us closer. I did not tell her I was homeless until

after Keb's death. I spent the last of my money from my graduate assistantship, which paid me about \$800 after fees and taxes were taken out a month, to fly back to California to see Keb for the last time. I was mainly living at my best friend's apartment. She was in student housing and it was against policy for me to stay with her for more than a few days. So every few days, I would pack my things and stay in the car, study at Highland Coffee, or order some pancakes at IHOP and stay the night. I remember losing weight and lied about how it was the work load that caused the weight loss. I was losing weight because I did not have food to eat. I applied for Louisiana Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which is a government funded program for food assistance, but because I had a full time job in June, I was ineligible.

This is the first time I am sharing this story with anyone outside of my mom. I never spoke to my sisters to ask for their help because I did not want anyone to know I was homeless, specifically, a homeless Asian American.

Me: I need to talk to you all. Help me in my time of need.

Keb: I am here for you Thuong. Keep talking.

Me: I am afraid. Afraid of the people I work with and what they can do. There is a White woman graduate student who grabbed my rosary beads that I wore for you today after your funeral. She told me to take it off because that is a Catholic thing. I told her I just came back from church, and she said I still need to take it off because that is not what Catholics do. I felt attacked Keb. What in the world just happened to me? She went in to touch my rosary beads around my neck and I thought she was going to choke me with her hand gesture. I informed our supervisors and my direct supervisor told me that if I continue pressing on this, I would lose my job. One of the senior leadership members addressed all the graduate students and even though they all supported me and comforted me behind doors, they were completely silent in the meeting. Only a

few days after, everyone pretended like nothing happened. That specific graduate student continued to bully me and say racially charged comments that everyone just ignored. All the microaggressions displayed: invading my privacy when she would leave her things on my desk, telling me to shut up because she was thinking, spreading rumors about me in our cohort, turning all her White friends against me by leaving multiple empty chairs between me and them in class, sending emotionally charged emails about how I am not doing my job correctly, asking me to take a picture so I wouldn't be in the picture with our colleagues or friends, making fun of my outfits, and the list goes on and on. I ended up not getting hired back at the office. At the end of my term, I met with the Director and Dean of Student and they asked me to share my story. I was hesitant, but did tell them everything. Maybe I was unskilled at telling them my stories, but they didn't do anything. They didn't look me in the eye when I was talking. I never got a follow up. While I was searching for a new graduate assistantship, my current supervisor told the hiring committee about his experience with me and how I asked to stay but the office thought I was unfit. I had to email everyone in the department to clarify that I did not want to stay. Why would they say that? What am I doing here Keb? What is going on? I know this is not what you had in mind to experience with me. Help me. Help me Keb.

Keb: I love you Thuong. This isn't what I wanted for you. This isn't what you wanted for yourself. But don't let them silence you. Be resilient. Be brave. Be a brave woman. Be a brave Vietnamese woman. Just like the two Empresses of Vietnam, they weren't welcomed either. But they eventually ruled a nation. That is what we {Vietnamese} people do, we are resilient, we are brave. Keep telling your story.*

Me: I can't tell my story Keb. No one will understand or believe me. I hide it too well. They'll think that I just want pity. I'm also the only Asian woman ever in the Master's program here. I don't want to create a bad image for us {Asians}.

Keb: I understand.

Keb does understand because that is what we do: we carry the burden of untold stories of what it means to struggle as an Asian American in the U.S. (Gee, 2009; Lee, 1994, 2015). Keb identified as a gay man, and he was also homeless after he was abused by my father. This is not uncommon for the Asian American gay community (Otalvaro-Hormillosa, 1999). Homelessness is an American reality that often excludes Asian Americans (Vostanis, Grattan & Cumella, 1998; Otalvaro-Hormillosa, 1999). For me to experience homelessness as an Asian American college student was not a reality I wanted to face. The support and services available at the university was never offered to me because I did not "fit" what the student in need might look like (Cress & Ikeda, 2003; Kohatsu, 1993).

Domestic violence is nonexistent in U.S. epistemologies on Asian American (Ho, 1990) I remember talking to friends over the years and comments such as,

"I have never seen an Asian homeless person. They don't exist."

"I just saw what I think is an Asian homeless person. A first time for everything."

"Asian families are always well put together."

"I want to raise my children in an Asian-like family."

Much of what we experience is internalized because we are socialized to be externally focused (Chung, 2001; Yeh & Huang, 1996). We are afraid of being lesser than if we share our stories, show our vulnerabilities, be outside of being the model minority, not performing *Asian* (Hartlep, 2012; Lee, 2010; SuSuki, 2002). Homelessness is not performing Asian because it demystifies

our role as hardworking and successful minorities (Hartlep, 2011, 2013; Chou & Feagin, 2008; Zhang, 2010).

What is unknown about being “Asian” is that the collective “we” are composed of very different and distinct ethnicities, and being southeast Asian is very different from being east, west, south, or north Asian (Ibrahim, Ohnishi & Sandhu, 1997; Ngo, 2006). This burden of untold stories causes us anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts, and yet we refuse to go see a counselor because we have society and family convincing us that we are okay (Gim, Atkinson & Whitely, 1990; Iwamoto & Lui, 2010). Specifically for Vietnamese American Americans, we are always expected to adapt, it is historically written in our stars with our interaction of being colonized and of immigrant status (Skinner, 1998). A forever outsider in the U.S. because of being a perpetual foreigner (Wu, 2002). For Asian American womans, the stereotypes and existing epistemologies goes beyond just adaptation: we are the model woman in this new world (Lee, 2013). Docile, quiet, submissive, dainty, feminine, oversexualized, fetishized, exotic, to name a few (Chan, 1988; Hofstede, 1996). This leaves us Asian American women wide open for dangerous and brutal patriarchy- not just from men, but very much so from women because patriarchy permeates within our societal interaction between woman to woman, i.e. cross your legs, that dress is too revealing, or do well in school and be a good listener (Parmar, 1982; Pyke & Johnson, 2003). I did not fit those stereotypes, not my personality, nor my situation. The university and those within its walls were ill-equipped in supporting me, as an outsider, to feel visible and welcomed because of the wrongful perception of who I am as a model minority who knows how to acculturate wherever I go (Teranishi, Behringer, Grey & Parker, 2009). This is a single story among many. The clash between two cultures and untold realities create multiple moments of suffering (Tan, 1990), but as Hanh (1987) declares, suffering is not enough.

Implications

Me: Grandmother Le, how did you learn to live with no teeth?

Grandmother Le: After your grandfather kicked all of my teeth in, I just ate porridge! Haha.

Me: That is not funny. [I am upset that my grandmother can joke about such an atrocious act].

Grandmother Le: Look, you will learn. Me no teeth? You with teeth? We can still both smile.

Me: *But Grandmother Le, did you not hurt, do the memories not hurt, when you think about what he did to you, does it not make you mad, or angry? Being a second wife is shameful in our culture, so why did you stay knowing what he can do to you. Why did you continue living, loving, and caring even after experiencing such pains?*

Grandmother Le: Physical pains. Mental pains. Psychological pains. I am aware of them, yes. I lived through 102 years of suffering, and what kept me alive and actually living was compassion. I was aware of the suffering so I wanted to end the cycle. Your Grandfather was not a bad man. He was a Japanese man who have been abused by our country after his own countryman left him behind. He was never shown compassion. Being aware of the suffering does not mean I avoid it, I just embrace it. I look for ways to contribute to those who are compassionate, like your mother. You know this whole neighborhood, only she and I get along as mother and daughter-in-law. That is very rare for our culture! Remember all the stories your other Grandmother and I use to tell you? Don't marry into a family with a nasty mother. Women know how to oppress other women. I stayed with your Grandfather because of my Mother-in-law. And your mother stayed with me for the same reason. Compassion builds a stronger more stable house than anger or fear. Look at the palm tree. It might look weak, or flimsy, always swaying here and then swaying over there, but when the tsunami comes? That tree is the only tree standing, and the other big and bold tree, it's been knocked down by the first set of winds." I'm not saying don't be angry or

mad, I'm simply asking you to grow your roots of emotion and understanding to make yourself more sturdy in life.

Me: Thank you Grandmother Le for your words. I do remember you telling me all these stories about trees, the tall grass, but I never realized what it all meant. I guess my seed didn't get to sprout yet? I'm not sure. These past 10 years... there's been a lot of rain Grandmother Le. There were storms and hurricanes.

Grandmother Le: You were a seed in Vietnam. You were watered with Vietnamese water. You were planted in Vietnamese soil. You were a palm tree in America.

Grandmother Le is a student of our ancestors, just as I am a student of Grandmother Le. With developing our philosophical pedagogy, epistemology, and ontology through the Zen Buddhist Path and oral histories, we were taught mindfulness and interbeing, and we practiced these philosophies through our way of life. By no means am I playing into the stereotype that all Asian are enlightened as mentioned above. This is not enlightenment, this is praxis of Vietnamese humanity, forged from our history of being a small nation with 4,000 years of history near the coast, susceptible to war and devastation (Hanh, 1987, 1998, 2007). We came to be through stories. We suffered as a nation, but we are a hybrid of east and west from our histories, who have deliberately sought inner peace from turmoil through mindfulness: the bombs are roaring and loud, but a Buddhist monk is picking parsley for their pho for lunch (Hanh, 1998). We found beauty in interbeing: it is not just the connection we have with each other and the physical things we trust our senses to bring us; it is being connected to reality, both of the world and of the mind (Hanh, 1991, 1998).

Our history include Viet Thuong, born from Long ago to Goddess Au Co and Dragon Emperor. Here, he meets a Chinese emperor who is planning to invade Vietnam:

Emperor: “Can you explain why your country is called Van Lang?”

Viet Thuong: Your Majesty, though our country is small, our king is peace-loving and our people industrious. The name of our country expresses our unique culture. ‘Van’ means bright and beautiful. ‘Lang’ means peace-loving and kind.”

Emperor: “I have been told that your people tattoo dragon on their bodies. What is the purpose of such a custom?”

Viet Thuong: Your Majesty, our people are the descendants of a heavenly goddess and the dragon emperor of the sea. The snow-white goddess bird and sea dragon are the symbols of our race. Fishermen believe that if they tattoo a dragon on their bodies, they will be protected from seam monsters.” Your Majesty, our land is like a bridge between the cultures of east and west. Because many foreigners pass through our kingdom, many of our people are proficient in foreign tongues.

Emperor: “And what is your name?”

Viet Thuong: Your Majesty, my name is Viet Thuong.”

Emperor: “How many family names exist in your country?”

Viet Thuong: “There are one hundred in all. Long ago Goddess Au Co and Dragon Emperor gave birth to the first one hundred children of our race. The names they gave them have been passed down through generations as our family names. My own king, King Hung Vuong, honored me by naming my home province after me.”

Emperor: One hundred family names... Your population cannot be too small...”

Emperor’s Advisor: “Your majesty, Van Lang is a small, backward country. Look at how they cut their hair short and leave their heads uncovered. If you could see how they chew areca nuts you would know how primitive they are. Clearly they are in need of civilization.”

Viet Thuong: “Your Majesty, civilization takes many forms. north and south are different. Earing long hair and hats in a tropical climate like ours would not be intelligent. Short hair is far more practical as we labor in our rice fields. We recognize that our bodies are a gift from the ancestors to be treated with respect, but we do not consider cutting our hair and nails an abuse of our bodies. On the contrary, we consider it a better way to care for them. Among our people, dragon tattooing is a fine art form and a way to preserve our heritage while surrounding by people of other cultures.”

Emperor: “But why do you chew areca nuts?”

Viet Thuong: “Chewing the areca nuts is a lovely and meaningful custom. The areca nut refreshes one's breathe and brightens conversation at gathers. It is far preferable to smoking tobacco. You have never heard the story that explains the origin of the areca nut, thus it is difficult for you to under its deep significance to us.”

Viet Thuong: “Your Majesty, not only does the areca nut freshen the breath, it also strengthens the teeth. People who chew areca nut rarely suffer toothache. In our land, no gathering is considered complete without areca. If you ever paid a visit to our King, I am sure he would offer it to you.”

Emperor: “What purpose has brought you to Chu?”

Viet Thuong: We have heard that for three years your kingdom has suffered no drought or flood. Peace has flourished in all four directions and your people have prospered. Knowing that such fortune must be due to your virtue as emperor, we crossed mountains and rivers to pay our respects. We have seen for ourselves how you have brought peace, culture, and prosperity to your people. We are confident that such an emperor would not waste precious lives by fanning the flames of war. Though we do not have as many troops as your army, our kind and people

share one heart. We repelled the might army of An when it invaded our kingdom. It is our hope that you will extend your virtue to ensure long-lasting peace among all peoples.”

Emperor: “Thank your king for sending you here and for offering these two rare, exquisite birds. I accept them but insist that any future delegations from your kingdom refrain from bringing gifts. What has our empire ever done for you that you should feel compelled to make offering to us? It would be emperor for me to expect tribute from your kingdom.”

Emperor: “There shall be no invasion of Van Lang. I want diplomatic ties instituted at once and maintained. Van Lang is a civilized land like our own. Rest assured, I have understood your intent in coming here. Long ago, our first emperor decreed that we should never invade our southern neighbors. I will abide by the ancestors rather than be swayed by troublemakers.” – (Hanh, 2007, p. 142-146).

We learn through our sufferings when cultures collide, to be in the present, but know our histories. To live with nonduality, civilized or uncivilized, to privilege yourself when others want to oppress, to choose paths our ancestors created for us through peace, not war, to practice mindfulness and interbeing with storytelling.

Conclusion

As mentioned above, the purpose of my research is a deliberate liberatory act, to locate locations of healing, where I am practicing the art of an inner journey: the ability to privilege oneself in and through a self-study research from a conscious decision for self-empowerment (Hamilton, Smith & Worthington, 2008; hooks, 1994; Ngunjiri, Hernandez & Chang, 2010) through critical Zen autoethnography. Being in touch with reality means being aware that suffering exists, where it exists, what caused it, how do we free ourselves from it, and what can

we do to eliminate it or to liberate ourselves for its affects. These are The Four Noble Truths I have applied to my methodology of critical Zen autoethnography.

CHAPTER 4: THE MUD AND THE LOTUS

In the summer of 2016 I decided to apply for jobs in higher education. I was the final candidate for three universities, one in North Carolina, California, and Florida. It was a hard decision to make because each college and state had its potential impact on my upcoming development. North Carolina was where I began my journey as a college student and where my adopted family resides. I could revisit what it means to be an adopted Asian American in higher education. California was where I grew up and where my birth family resides. I thought about the possibility of revisiting where I grew up, the impoverished area of northern California and debunking the model minority stereotypes with the many Asian American students' stories of struggle, including my own. Florida was a state I have never lived in but always wanted to because of my research on Asian Americans in the southeast region of the U.S and it was an opportunity of gaining a new perspective for me. I decided to take the position at Florida because of my professional aspirations to work directly with Asian American students and digging deeper into what it means to occupy spaces as an Asian American in the south. It was my desire to continue to experience and hear of other Asian American college experiences being in the south. In addition, the university was the only university in the south that has a standing center dedicated for Asian Americans. The benefits of being in Florida was enough for me to make my decision without much hesitation. I started working at Tee University (TU), a large public state PWI, in August of 2016 and began writing my findings for my dissertation research.

My first memorable interaction with Asian American student leaders at TU, which included three graduate students and five undergraduate students, was during our first unit retreat. It was a bonding experience for the leadership team, especially when we shared narratives of struggle and resiliency as Asian Americans in the U.S. However, I caught myself

regressing in this moment when I was implicitly oversimplifying and questioning their Asian American experiences with racism and discrimination. What I was experiencing was similar to Amy Liu's (2009) anecdote-based sentiments of regressing in attitudes on Asian American issues for our own group, and our self, without realizing how we have regressed, when we re-experience implicit biases, prejudice, discrimination, and racism.

During the retreat, a student shared with the group how there was little representation of Asian Americans in the political science department at TU, and when the topic of prejudice, discrimination, or racism was brought up, their opinion and comments were disregarded. I remember being at SU in the history department and had similar sentiments, but ten years ago I said to myself, "it's not a big deal, I'm overthinking it" and here I am, ten years later, saying it to myself on behalf of that student "it's not a big deal, they are overthinking it."

After reflecting on our interactions at the retreat, I began juxtaposing my experiences at SU and KU to the students' experiences at TU and realized, it is easy to recreate the wheel of suffering, like how I was invalidating their experiences by invalidating my own experiences again. Thus, I posit that we must employ a non-western approach in higher education, the practice of mindfulness, as a way for us as practitioners to become skillful in not replicating the wheel of suffering. If we are mindful of our thoughts, intentions, speech, etc. and practice unlearning, we are actively engaging in dismantling the wheel of suffering (discrimination, prejudice, racism, etc.). Our practice is ongoing and should never finish. As Thich Nhat Hanh (1998) teaches us,

"Mindfulness trainings are practices, no prohibitions. They do not restrict our freedom. They protect us, guarantee our liberty, and prevent us from getting entangled in difficulties and confusion. When we fail, we lift ourselves up and try again to do our best.

In fact, we can never succeed ounce hundred percent. The mindfulness trainings are like the North Star. If we want to travel north, we can use the North Star to guide us, but we never expect to arrive at the North Star” (p. 7).

Within this chapter, I will focus on the juxtapositions of my lived experiences to those who I serve, Asian American college students, and use data (my personal journal entries, reflections, etc.), AsianCrit, and research on Asian Americans in higher education, to provide historical context and identify the existence of Asian American college student suffer (the mud), and ultimately find liberation (the lotus) from those experiences. My decision to work at TU provided the opportunity for me to situate my past experiences of suffering in college to the current students and their suffering through the practice of interbeing (Hanh, 2007). I am able to contextualize ten years of lived experiences by remembering, reliving, re-experiencing, and potentially give meaning to those experiences through my interactions with the Asian American college students at TU.

I use the spaces at TU to continue the reconciliation and liberation of suffering for myself as a college student through pushing the boundaries of academic research on how to consolidate the results in this dissertation. These results are the experiential reality of being Asian American attending PWIs in the southeast region of the U.S., which is an atypical method of producing results, but the significance is providing my own truth of suffering to liberate myself in order to begin to heal. As Sue, et al. (2007) explains, “the experiential reality of Asian Americans has continued to indicate the existence of racial microaggression, but their ambiguous and subtle nature makes them difficult to identify and quantify” (p. 79). The findings highlighted in this research serves as a continuation of using the experiential reality of Asian American college students to trace the sufferable moments (the mud), including the microaggression mentioned by

Sue, et al. (2007), and make them less subtle and ambiguous, more identifiable and quantifiable, and hopefully, liberate us from these realities (the lotus) in order to feel less vulnerable on U.S. college campuses. The nontraditional methods offered in this research allows us to practice non-action and to just be- “to be in the here and the now- solid and fully alive- is a very positive contribution to our collective situation” (Hanh, 2014a, p. 21). Like the essential teachings of mindfulness, this research might serve as a guide on how to sit with the discomfort from our suffering without attaching an action steps in the results (Hanh, 2014a). To let the mud (our suffering) be used to create the lotus (our liberation).

The Muddiest Experiences at SU: The Lotus of “Please call me Thuong”

“Most people are afraid of suffering. But suffering is a kind of mud to help the lotus flower of happiness grow. There can be no lotus flower without the mud” (Hanh, 2014, p. 5).

-Thich Nhat Hanh

After analyzing and reflecting on my experiences (data) at SU, the memories that caused me lasting suffering, or as Hanh (2007, 2014) explains, the muddiest of my experiences, was when I changed my name. Recollecting some of my experiences at SU, such as changing my name, reuniting with my birth family, the times when my peers called me a gook, communist, or telling me I was acting like a twinkie or banana, were times when I experienced discrimination, prejudice, and racism. Those experiences were in tandem with being Vietnamese American, which had the implication that even though I had negative experiences in college and no support as an Asian American, society still saw me as a high performing individual because of my ethnicity (Bankston, Caldas & Zhou, 1997). I pin point the root of the issue for me was the changing of my name- because I truly believed that having a perceived Americanized name would eliminate potential pains I felt from the discrimination, prejudice, and racist interactions

from high school. My attachment to what I thought the name “Krystie” would provide for me caused me to suffer. Therefore, on October 2016, I changed my name back to Thuong through learning about myself and the transformation which occurred during my time in college (Baumgartner, 2001). I began transitioning back to Thuong on social media. There were many text messages and conversations where people would question why I chose to change my name. Comments were made such as, “You are confusing me, why are you doing this?” “who is Thuong?” which discouraged my decision. However, those who knew me as Thuong also made comments such as, “Wow, it was so great to see you as Thuong again” “I love your name.” My decision was sparked by rereading a journal entry I wrote in 2007. It made me question why I stuck with Krystie for so long as I read the excerpt from my journal below:

“...I’m not sure why people have to be so rude. I don’t come up to a random person and ask their name and then completely ignore their answer and ask it again. What do they mean by telling me “no,” and “what is your *real* name?” What if Krystie is my real name! Wait, it is my real name! What makes Krystie so not real? This is like the fifth time this semester. I’m so annoyed. Why does this always happen when I meet new people.”

I realized why I kept my name, and the reasons are similar to Bonazzo and Wong’s (2007) case studies of the Japanese international women college students, who experienced discrimination, prejudice, and racism: I did not want to give up my chances of doing well in college by pointing out the issues within the university. The moment when I step into a class for the first time and the issue of my name is brought up, I instantly felt the wandering eyes of my peers, the little snickers when administration failed to apologize for butchering my name, and it made me want to become invisible so I would not continue to be subjected to the treatment of being perpetuated as a foreigner. Another case study by Hartlep and Nguyen (2016) discussed how administrative color

blindness and racial microaggressions causes the student to feel invisible and vulnerable as a model minority, and I can attest to those feelings. It made me feel insecure, caused me depression and anxiety, and most importantly, it made me self-hate my Asian identity during my college experience at SU.

I never wrote words such as perpetual foreigner or xenophobia in my journal entries while at SU, but that does not invalidate the experiences of being a perpetual foreigner or be in situations where my peers were xenophobic. Amaya (2007) explains that we, as Asian Americans, perform our acculturation through our name change, to make us less foreign in hopes of experiencing less xenophobic situations. As I was trying to acculturate at SU, I was suffering from feeling dejected and unaccepted because ultimately, the act of changing my name was not going to make society less cognizant of my yellow skin or rounded nose.

The topic of Asian Americans with Americanized names came up again at TU during one of our staff potlucks. It brought back unpleasant memories of my time at SU with how unsuccessful I was at changing my name. Some ambassadors spoke about how they were accommodating to people mispronouncing their names but chose to keep going by their culturally given name because they did not want to lose their identity. Some admitted to being tired of hearing their name mispronounced and decided to change their names to a recognizable Americanized name. Others were given an Americanized first name at birth in the U.S. but experience the “what is your *real* name?” conversation. Here we see how being the model minority changes our experiences, to the basic nature of our name. Asian cultural values such as modesty and self-effacement, which are not widely valued by western culture, often puts our personal wants and needs secondary (Zane, et al., 1991), and in my experience with changing my name, this is indeed true. Thus, after my experiences with changing my name to Krystie and

having my identity questioned, I find it necessary to model the way for the students at TU, as well as finding self-agency, and reclaim my cultural identity with changing my name back to Thuong. My happiness is getting to know what my name means again. Owning my compassion, love for humanity, the true meaning behind my name, has been liberating within itself. The change is symbolic, since I never legally changed my name to Krystie, and many people are still unable to say Thuong correctly. However, because “Krystie” is now being written, seen, and spoken less, and it is an option I have created for myself, rather than a restriction that I have made on my identity, Thuong is replacing the spaces where “Krystie” once occupied, and I find it liberating to once again be known as Thuong.

The Muddiest Experiences at OU: The Lotus of Finding Voice and Community

My time at KU were the darkest years of my life. In retrospect, family, romantic relationship, and other factors of living affected my college experience. I was bullied, threatened, and ostracized as a master’s student by cohort members in my program as well as in my assistantship because I did not fit into their perceived notion of performing my ascribed model minority status. Cheryan and Bodenhausen (2000) posit the experience I went through as the psychological hazards of being the model minority and the negative effects of positive stereotypes. I was dealing with homelessness, depression, anxiety, broken-heartedness, and suicidal thoughts- all of which were bundled into the excuse of me being unprofessional and unfit for the office. Journaling helped me process emotions too raw to discuss with anyone else. It was during my master’s program where I engaged in more conversations with my past grandmothers, especially after Keb’s passing. Here is a passage in my journal during my first semester in my master’s program:

Tuesday, November 14, 2011

Today is your birthday. You are now 20 years old. Happy birthday Keb. I wish we were together to celebrate you. But instead, I'm here, wishing I wasn't here. I'm trying so hard to be okay without you, but I'm not. I haven't slept or eaten in several days. The funny thing is that some folks have complimented me on how much weight I have lost. Are they celebrating my grief? But how would anyone know? I don't tell anyone anything. It has been a month now and things keep getting worse and worse. I threw out all of O's things he gave to me a week ago because I felt abandoned. Our scrapbook, my teddy, photo albums, our paintings, all of it. Gone. But I don't feel anything. I'm so numb right now. Then just yesterday, I walked into class and just wanted to cry. The classroom is still divided between the black students sitting on one side and the white students sitting on the other side. I don't fit in. I don't have a place. My discomfort isn't acknowledged. My pain is subtle, but they know. I can tell they know I feel like I don't belong. What's worse, I think they think I don't belong either. There is one particular person who will laugh at what I wear, she has commented on how I put my hair up with my pen when I don't have a hair tie, and whisper to her friends when I'm talking in class while looking at me. The professor isn't saying anything. Maybe he don't see it. I don't help the situation by not bringing it to his attention either. But I wish he could see what is going on. Maybe he does and is just ignoring it? I'm so emotionally crippled that even witnessing all of this, I just wish I was as invisible as they make me- just disappear and go find you in the other world. I miss you so much. I'm so sorry for not being strong during this time. I feel like you're not proud of me. I'm sorry Keb. I'm sorry I'm not able to function like a normal human being. Please help me through this time. Help me see why we chose this path for me."

My journal entry highlights the numbing effects of long-term suffering, and reflecting on its roots, I have come to realize I suffered because I felt voiceless. I suffered working for a diversity office and was called “black,” because I did not say anything to correct their statements. At the same time, when I did use my voice and I tried to write about my experiences of racism, a white professor invalidated my experiences and once again I was voiceless. I was made vulnerable through being invisible as a voiceless Asian American, desperately clinging onto the dwindling hope of wanting to be seen and heard for more than just what society has portrayed someone who looks like me should be and act like. Much of the discomfort in being at KU was operating in the liminal spaces of the black/white racial paradigm in the south. Here, I emphasize the need to critically examine Asian American bodies in the spaces such as KU.

One finding through the use of AsianCrit is the court case of *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind*, 261 U.S. 204 (1923). In 1919, Bhagat Thind, an Indian Sikh, filed a petition for naturalization under the Naturalization Act of 1906, which allowed only “free white persons” and “aliens of African nativity and persons of African descent” to become U.S. citizens. By 1927, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Asians were legally equivalent to blacks. Here, the reality of Asian bodies occupying the racialized liminal spaces in the U.S. as Asian Americans was unanimously decided by the United States Supreme Court in reference to was that we were ineligible for naturalized citizenship in the U.S. because we were not white (Hartlep & Nguyen, 2016). The *Thind* case and the Supreme Court’s interpretation for Asians offers historical perspective on how Asians were either black or white, and in this case, Asians were given the same spaces as blacks on the issue of naturalization, citizenship, and schooling (Hartlep & Nguyen, 2016). The spaces of KU is historically discriminatory, prejudice, and racist. Even after

decades of integration, my experiences highlights how KUis unfit to protect and make spaces for students who operate in the liminal spaces of not being black or white.

Before considering black or white spaces, we must dissect how Asians faced discrimination which prohibited Asians of occupying any spaces in the U.S. For example, there was a need for cheap labor to build railroads which required more workers than what the U.S. produced. Through supply and demand, the first large scale Asian immigration to the U.S. occurred in the mid-1880s from Chinese individuals, mainly men, who came to work on the railroads (Tachiki, 1971). As more Asian bodies occupied spaces of the U.S., there was a backlash which adopted the western image of Asian people, for the U.S. it was for the Chinese workers, as evil, menacing, and a peril to western society. This was the birth of “yellow peril”—the portrayal of Asian immigrants as a threat to the American people and their society—manifested into the first anti-Asian U.S. immigration law: the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 (Miller, 1969). Through using AsianCrit lens, Asians were the first group of people to be banned from the U.S. and had to deal with immigration rights. As Takaki (2012) posit, Asians and Asian Americans continued to face racial segregation into the 1800s and 1900s, and as other scholars such as Wu (2003), Wing (2007), and Teranishi (2010), to name a few, would claim, Asian Americans are continuing to face such discrimination, prejudice, and racism into present day.

The examples of the *Thind* case and the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 are historical references on how Asians have been silenced, voiceless, vulnerable, and ultimately excluded from fully participating with visibility and voice in the U.S. My experiences in graduate school at KU highlights how I, as an Asian American, still face those issues in present day. In addition, students at TU have also shared their narratives with me on the issue of being vulnerable because they have been silenced on many issues. One particular incident was when a Desi, of

Bangladesh, Indian, Pakistan, or South Asian descendant, group of woman dancers were practicing their Bollywood performance and two white men, who aggressively took over their practice space by demanding that they teach them how to do some of the dances, called them invasive species. The two men mocked the dancers and their dances, like how the graduate student mocked my hair style and styling techniques. What I experienced was not uncommon, what the Desi ladies experienced was not an isolated incident, what we, collectively as women of color, experience is vulnerability and violence because of who we are and how systems of oppression continues to work against us (Crenshaw, 1991). However, as I continue to navigate higher education, I take the suffering, the muddiest of experiences, from being voiceless and vulnerable to find my community. My liberation, my lotus, is knowing our common struggle is now shared by our own voices, and no one else's interpretation of it. We tell our stories of suffering as a form of using our own voice to liberate. My lotus is finding my voice, with the help of many brave Asian Americans at TU. My lotus is my community of silenced individuals who no longer wishes to be silent on our issues.

My Mud, My Lotus: Finding a Community with Collective Suffering and Collective Joy

I began chapter four explaining the path I chose after my tenure at OU: moving to Florida to work with Asian American college students in the southeast region of the U.S. I confess to my selfish reason for wanting to be at TU, which is that I purposefully sought out this opportunity because I believe it would bring another unique perspective towards my findings and conclusion for my dissertation research. The experiences within the first four months of being at TU has had an impact on my reflection of past experiences, particularly because of my exposure to other Asian American college students' experiences and further experiencing what it means to be an Asian American employee in higher education.

In the beginning of my time at TU, I remember interviewing for the position and presenting myself as an “evolving Asian critical theorist,” explaining to the audience who attended my presentation that my work, as an Asian critical theorist, is grounded in Asian Pacific Islander American issues, inspired by Legal Critical Studies, particularly Critical Race Theory, for which I explore and critique how society, law, and systems have historically oppressed Asians in the U.S. (McGowan & Lindgren, 2006). The forum was a radical space for me: I wanted to expose myself as both a practitioner and scholar in Asian American college student affairs. As Museus and Kiang (2009) deconstructs the issues of how Asian Pacific Islander American affairs are rarely the topic of higher education research, with less than one percent of articles published in five of the highly regarded academic journals in the field of higher education (Museus, 2009), my duty as both the practitioner and scholar was to continue working with Asian American students at TU to dig for the suffering (mud) and highlight the liberation (lotus) of our existence at the university in order to do my part in contributing to the field of higher education. However, as I begin my tenure at TU, my findings have altered the reality of what it means to operate as an Asian American in higher education. I realize, my mud, my lotus, is part of the collection of the muds and lotuses of many Asian Americans. My findings are not meant to be conclusive, overgeneralized, or provide any overarching truths to what it means to be a first generation, immigrant, woman, Asian American college student. If anything, it is to contextualize the continuation of the impact of discrimination, prejudice, and racism I have faced both as a student and as a professional in higher education and the implications it has on my mental health (Hwang & Goto, 2008). Thus, my findings are never conclusive. At best, they serve as a lighthouse, similar to that of Hancock, Allen, and Lewis’s (2015) metaphor of autoethnographies as a lighthouse for our experiences, as I continue to experience and listen to

other Asian American college students and their experiences and make meaning of our existence in the U.S.

One particular finding at TU, for which I am compelled to present to further dissect with reflection, is on being an Asian American employee in higher education at TU. Through social circumstances, described by Chow (1987) as the ability to develop and transform who I am as a critically conscious Asian American woman, I now describe what it means to be me in a white-washed space. I was more aware of what was going on around me at TU and thought critically about the implications of being a person of color in this space through being critically conscious of the intersection of my identity as an Asian American woman. I started my position with hyped energy, ready to delve into the work of multiculturalism, social justice, diversity, and inclusion only to find discrimination, prejudice, and racism rampant in the department. Within the first few weeks, a colleague, a white woman, who started in the same department and time as me, called me a “stealthy ninja” multiple times, proposed doing an energizer for our department’s retreat with something she called, “stupid ninja,” which was taught to her when she was in college for drama, and shared her narrative of attending an “all Asian party” where her Filipino god mother drew “chinky” eyes on her and her friends in order to relate with me and my Asian identity. I did not know how to react to such blatant incidences of racism- therefore, I was unskilled with my reaction. It has been over a decade since I have had to experience these overt forms of racist behavior. Much of what was experienced in graduate school at KU were microaggressions, but this was different. It was an act of happenstance where the colleague and I shared a room at our unit retreat for the department where, based on the racial discrimination I experienced, I confronted the colleague unskillfully. My developed mental health issues at TU caused by that individual, which were psychological distress, suicidal ideation, state anxiety, trait anxiety, and

depression (Hwang & Goto, 2008), manifested into physical health issues in the form of chronic hives and I experienced a near death situation when my breathing was compromised. I was rushed to the hospital in time to get treated with minimal side effects.

Within the first semester at TU, the head of our department, an African American man, was let go mid-semester, the most senior employee, an Asian American woman with 14 years of experience in the department, was let go at the end of the semester, two men of color, one Latin American and the other African American, took leadership roles in a department full of women, specifically women of color, the white woman colleague who started at the same time as me brought to the attention of the leadership team within our department that our office was perceived as an anti-white place, and the same white woman filed a complaint with the office of human resources on me based on her claim of me discriminating against her disability.

Concurrently, students of color began noticing how certain white folks in the department were dismissing their lived experiences such as, the failure to see why police officers carrying guns, who were invited into their space, would make several students react with hyper sensitivity and anxiety, calling people with similar ethnic backgrounds by the wrong name and continue to make the same mistakes without any regards or correction to their behavior, or the administrative blindness to how many students of color left an office due to the leadership making the office unwelcoming for them.

Somehow, these experiences did not break my spirit or the students' spirits. Over the course of the semester, I intentionally stayed after hours collecting data by listening to students' who were willing to share their stories, held pot lucks so they had outlets for their suffering, created focus groups in order to use the spaces of the university for them to be exposed to scholarly work on what they were experiencing, and lastly, be available for them virtually

through multiple forms of communication (text, groupme, social media, phone, etc.). I was inspired by the AsianCrit Theorist, Robert S. Chang (1993), who writes,

“An Asian American Legal Scholarship will recognize that Americans are differently situated historically with respect to other empowered groups. But it will also acknowledge that, in spite of historical differences, the commonality found in shared oppression bring different disempowered groups together to participate in others' struggles” (p. 1249).

With Chang's (1993) explanation, I understood my findings for this research was centered on the collective suffering and collective joy for myself and those around me. The suffering (mud) will always exist, and will continue to exist as long as there are systems of oppression in place, particularly at the universities for diverse students (Crozier, et al., 2008). However, the liberation and hope for healing (lotus) from our sufferable experiences is our collective joy: where we are able to listen to each other, take care of ourselves and one another, through practicing mindfulness and interbeing as a community (Hanh, 1998, 2000, 2007, 2014). I came to TU in search of results, what I found what much more powerful: my community of lotuses in the mud.

CHAPTER 5: BEING IS PEACE

In this chapter, I present my conclusions from autoethnographic research as an Asian American first generation immigrant woman attending undergraduate, graduate, and doctorate programs at PWIs in the southeastern region of the U.S. Revisiting my research questions:

1. What are the causes of suffering in higher education?
2. How is that suffering experienced?
3. What are some sources of healing?

The causes of my suffering in higher education are attributed broadly to inadequate epistemologies on intersectional identities resulting from a lack of mindfulness and interbeing. Higher education personnel do not acknowledge the suffering caused by their lack of awareness and action to counter the white supremacist patriarchal culture dominating their institutions, which leads to a cyclical propagation of suffering. As administrations ignore the dominant culture's oppression, we experience suffering, manifesting as negative emotions (anger, sadness, turmoil, etc.), and harming our ability to learn, our physical well-being, and even our future. Thus, I conclude that any institution that does not have a commitment to support diverse students in ways that match their complex struggles and experiences will only allow oppression to permeate students' consciousness, degrading the college experience. The adjustment I made in order to sustain my participation in higher education was catharsis through storytelling- a source of healing that allows me to engage in the work at U.S. college campuses.

I was able to find healing through a therapy based in scholarship: a narrative inquiry of mindfulness and interbeing. As Brown and Ryan (2003) posit, "mindfulness is inherently a state of consciousness" (p. 824). Understanding and practicing interbeing allows us to be mindful, which enables us to be conscious of suffering around us while remaining joyful in the moment.

This journey of self-analysis and care led to an investigation of why mindfulness is needed within the spaces of the university (Bush, 2011). As I conducted my research on suffering, I found my sources of healing through storytelling, scholarship, research, writing, and listening to those around me with similar sufferings. Over the last year, I unpacked implicit biases and began to unlearn negative socialized habits through those academic tools available to me. There was a level of consciousness I was able to develop, similar to bell hooks' (2000) *From Margin to Center*, which helped me heal through in-depth self-exploration and provocatively question the limited scope of how my own identity has been explored and exploited in the U.S. as well as in higher education. Ultimately, my experiences highlight that being on the margins means I have the ability to experience both suffering and peace, especially given the opportunity, to use my own voice and reclaim my own narrative and address oppression with liberation. Higher education student services should recognize the possibilities in this process and strive to make space for such tools of self exploration and community available to diverse students.

In order for us to dismantle oppression in higher education – students and staff should practice mindfulness and interbeing. We should not accept the status quo for support; centers for counseling, wellness, or multicultural affairs can be a starting place to practice mindfulness, interbeing, and inclusion, but they should not be the only departments to do so. Standards should be set for all staff, faculty, students, stakeholders, board members, etc. to be competent beings who are striving to end suffering. Practitioners need to practice mindfulness as much as possible – we should be able to acknowledge that students are suffering, to know that anxiety exists at home, on campus, in resident halls, etc. We need to explore how we can make the topic of suffering a part of the curriculum and not just the extracurricular, a part of our interbeing instead of our interactions. Ultimately, I am calling for educational and cultural reform in the ivory

tower. It starts with each and every individual's effort to move all of us in the direction of mindfulness and interbeing. As Michael Fullan (1993) in *Change Forces: Probing the Depths of Educational Reform* posit:

“Systems change when enough kindred spirits coalesce in the same change direction.

This is why top-down structural change does not work. You can't mandate what matters because there are no shortcuts to change in systems' cultures” (p. 143).

We all can move in the same direction when we realize that being is suffering and it can allow us to see ourselves and each other as suffering beings.

Being is Suffering

There are privileges that need to be unpacked when we discuss college students on campus. A part of unpacking privilege is understanding that a college campus unavoidably causes suffering because it perpetuates privilege. The creation, design, and function of higher education was meant to serve a culture based on white male supremacy. Diverse students in higher education now have the theories of knowledge, justification, and rationality to understand and overcome those barriers, but the university must first recognize those barriers (Howard, 2006). The administration should address the suffering caused by these persistently racist institutions by acknowledging them. Do not make diverse students, faculty, and staff feel as though they have to go along with obvious fantasies regarding fairness and opportunity within U.S. institutions of higher education. The administration often buries the narrative of white male supremacy that has been central to the development, funding, and social network-determinative employment opportunities fostered by most U.S. colleges (Anderson, 1988). Instead of burying these narratives, administrations should openly acknowledge objective statistically measurable correlations between race and gender, and fundraising/program investment. To this end, student

services can track concrete metrics based on demographics and geographic origin within student and post-graduate data collection efforts.

In other words, practitioners should consciously seek to measure and acknowledge the problems of inequity that plague U.S. culture; higher education institutions have a unique opportunity to alleviate the suffering of diverse groups through an official acknowledgement of barriers to their success. The unacknowledged barriers/suffering in U.S. culture and higher education also harm the dominant culture. They too are forming their identities in environments of unacknowledged suffering, thus, if universities abdicate the responsibility to establish an accurate epistemology for barriers to diverse students due to fear of backlash from white-supremacist parents, alums, funding organizations, etc., they may never understand or empathize with a third of their fellow college constituent (not to mention socio-political dynamics across the globe). If we can first acknowledge that being is suffering, it opens up our abilities to empathize and learn; we can reduce that suffering, and then truly unpack some of the privileges addressed throughout this paper.

It is beneficial to investigate methods that work for each campus, including climate surveys, recruitment, retention, class satisfaction, program satisfaction, etc. – you can say that students are doing well to parents, funders, and administrators, but also openly discuss how they are also suffering. These two conditions for students can coexist because of interbeing, and can coexist without conflict. When we say there is suffering, it allows us to be mindful and continue to look at its causes. Interbeing, mindfulness, and storytelling are some of the ways suffering is explored by individuals and communities.

I have shared narratives through autoethnography in hopes of finding sources of healing. I found individual suffering and also recognized the suffering endured by my communities -

specifically the Asian American community. There is no prescribed right or wrong way to address suffering. The only requirement that should be set by higher education is to learn and talk about it; acknowledging and trying to understand suffering is a good first step whether a student is experiencing (and/or doing) harm within racist, elitist, classist, and sexist institutions of higher education. We form our identities by processing our suffering, a fact acknowledged in psychological and philosophical research, why not explore that process in a healthy way throughout the student experience.

Scholarship and research are potentially powerful sources of healing across culture and privilege barriers. In some cases, healing can be as simple as listing our sources of suffering, how other people suffer, and possible sources of healing. Every peer reviewed, autoethnographic, and community resource I have encountered calls for acknowledgement and understanding of these cultural dynamics. I have not encountered a single academic or anecdotal call for silence regarding these social patterns, yet organizational inertia seems to lead away from funding programs or making space for this type of learning and community building in higher education. The marketing and funding-based incentives for this dishonesty are clear, but a commitment to silence and ignorance is not a valid response. Acknowledging suffering and making space for community in the areas addressed by this study are low-impact, modest-budget-increase measures that can improve the student experience, retention, and alumni participation in U.S. higher education. The common goal in acknowledging suffering is for us to strive for being at peace. Once we acknowledge suffering, we can begin to transform from 'being is suffering' to 'being is peace.'

Being is Peace

Acknowledgement of truth, in spite of dominant culture politics, is a gateway to mindfulness, interbeing, and greater student success. The complex narratives behind each diverse student's surmounted barriers and moments of suffering create a framework for how they build all other academic and technical knowledge. Sharing those stories among diverse campus groups, as well as creating space for students to open their narratives up to dominant culture students, sends a message that the higher education organization is going to earn diverse students' innovation by being aware of the barriers to those students' success as individuals. Future successful alumni will be willing to contribute to such an innovative university (I use this reductive, popular view of administration motivations only as a catalyst to change). Denial of these facts pits diverse students against the institution as an agent of white supremacy.

Suffering is necessary for happiness. Most have experienced enough suffering to alchemize into happiness without looking for more (Hanh, 2007a). The University is often the first experience in which young people expect to be freed from the suffering present in the circumstances of their upbringing. Students arrive at the university expecting the professors and administration to have some understanding of environments defined by inequality, oppression, privilege, violence, racial and sexual discrimination in which many students have been raised. Growing up in Stockton, one of the poorest and most diverse cities in the country, affluent Long Island, and religious regions of U.S. Southeast, I can attest that immigrant populations, white New Yorkers, and Southern Baptist preachers alike, expect the university to recognize and address the pervading U.S. culture of ignorance, hatred, and oppression, though in the case of the latter, such recognition is seen as sinful. Students expect the university to understand the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. when he said "The function of education is

to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character - that is the goal of true education.” The words of Thich Nhat Hanh dovetail perfectly with King in his assertion that, “for our dialogue to be open, we need to open our hearts, set aside our prejudices, listen deeply, and represent truthfully what we know and understand.” (Hanh, 2007a, p. 100).

Recently, Dr. Marc Lamont Hill was featured as the keynote speaker for an MLK Celebration event at TU and expressed his interpretation of King’s words and messages for students, faculty, staff, and community members. Dr. Hill highlighted how radical King’s dream was during the Civil Rights Movement: to dream the impossible, to dream what we were never taught and could not imagine as reality for ourselves. What if we can dream of students and colleagues in universities that acknowledge suffering and strive for peace when designing every policy, curriculum, program, and initiative? What if we begin to radically dream that being is peace? Once we begin to dream, we can (re)conceptualize reality.

When the university has failed to acknowledge these obvious social dynamics in the past, it is bitter disappointment for some, a realization that there is no escape from the hateful oppression they have experienced thus far. For others, it is a realization that their privileged upbringing and their parents’ white supremacist viewpoints are indeed a reflection of reality, and that their best path lies in further oppression. After all, “when our beliefs are based on our own direct experience of reality and not on notions offered by others, no one can remove these beliefs from us.” (Hanh, 2007a, p. 100). There is no control group for a study on the rate of university success among races and genders outside of historical oppression and suffering. One can only address this question through qualitative, case study, or autoethnographic research. For example, of the dozens of current/former students with which I have discussed this topic, none have reported an adequate response to these issues from institutions of higher education. The current

state of U.S. political/media discourse is in crisis: I call for higher education administrations to train all faculty and staff as gatekeepers to higher salaries via grade allocation. They have the power to encourage and enforce peace and to provide a safe space for human complexity within all higher education discussion in their classrooms. Conservative parents and community members in the South often distrust education, yet they send their children and grandchildren to college to become better than themselves: it is an institution of unique and extraordinary trust. The majority of parents and grandparents send their children into the higher education system hoping for their child's acceptance, challenge, and expansion of awareness; colleges do not have to allow a bigoted few to poison the dominant culture of the campus. If the administration publicly acknowledges the suffering of their diverse students, and creates a safe space to address that suffering, they are facilitating the sharing of narratives in an uncritical, healing environment.

Concluding Thoughts

The sources of healing I was able to experience through the therapy of scholarship and narrative inquiry brought me back to my culture in the form of mindfulness and interbeing. Cultures contain an associated healing framework for their members, here, we can tap into those frameworks and provide space for college students who are exploring their identities to connect to entrenched early childhood education - beginning with connection to their culture. This way of thinking was supported by my own journey of unencouraged development, which has led me to provocatively question the limited scope of identity-awareness; my journey has only been inhibited by U.S. university institutions during my education experience. Ultimately, I think my anecdotal experience indicates that being on the margins creates space for both suffering and peace. Official acknowledgment of the challenges discussed in this paper

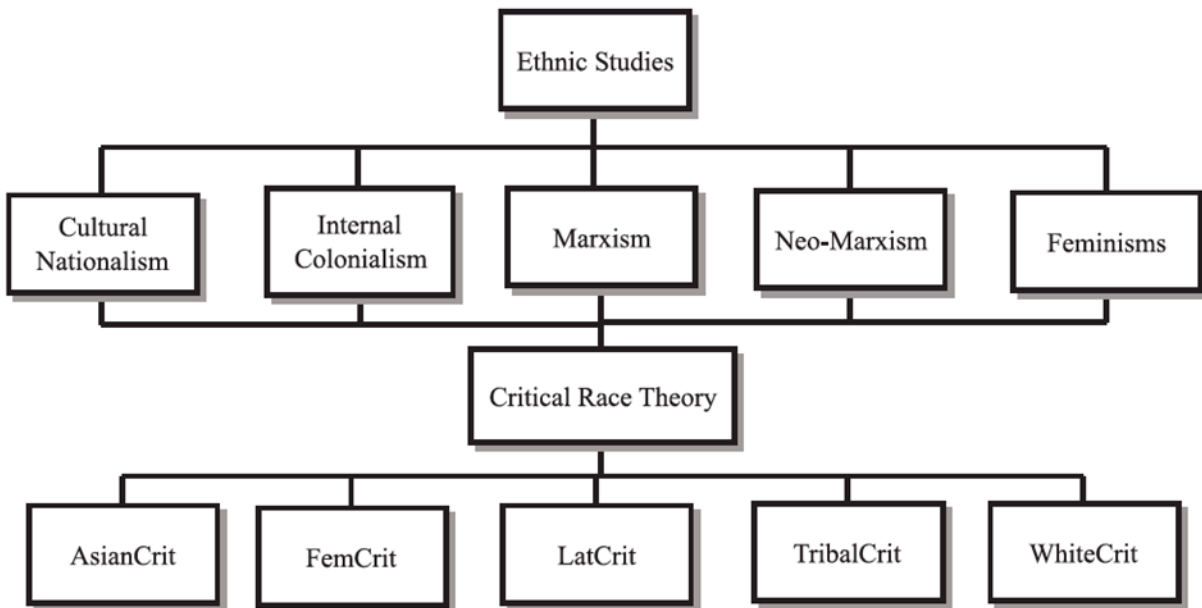
(even in generalities throughout the student experience) would have alleviated my perception of isolation, of struggling against a monolithic dominant culture antipathy.

The U.S. higher education system loses legitimacy if it does not keep up with narratives of powerlessness in the face of current (objectively measurable) academic and natural decline. Marginalized groups fighting for social and environmental justice have to experience these fears in the present, not as the vague apocalyptic fear of the dominant group. All coursework is related to these inequitably experienced challenges, and so all coursework should include inequity as a lens of instruction. This is not to say that universities need to stress a model of dominant and subordinate suffering, such hierarchical presentation only causes more division and discrimination (Patel, 2011). It is not difficult to teach the facts of inequitable suffering without placing blame or establishing primacy. Thus, intersectional identities that have been marginalized can unpack the phenomenon of how their identities have caused them or others to suffer without minimizing the suffering inherent in all identity development (Crenshaw, 1989).

The goal of addressing suffering is not to repair individual psychology in the present – it's to prevent negative experiences from university administration pretense and ignorance in the future – not a solution, but an awareness and transformation – pointing out the issues. Oppressed groups are exhausted by telling white folks what to do – tired of telling the good intended, if research-lazy, white people how to behave, as though they are speaking for a monolithic community. The university should take on that role, not individual diverse students. Universities should not focus on teaching just solutions, they should be aware enough to know the variables of their stakeholders, and then use that information to teach students to research and empathize. Education practitioners can use this kind of autoethnographic research as a lighthouse (Hancock & Allen, 2015).

Finding a community is a good source of healing. The college does not have to implement a specific curriculum – encourage the community, with funding and public recognition, instead of sanitizing it. If a bunch of students get together to denigrate their elected representatives, for example, they should be encouraged to do that in order to heal. The same goes for students who wish to gather and denigrate the dominant, racist, sexist culture inside and outside of the higher education community. The university has actively participated in control and censorship of these types of groups for centuries. The important task is not to suddenly become an agent of positive influence, a white savior, but to get out of the way. The university doesn't need to create a proactive curriculum for minority advancement over other groups, just create space for discussion about the causes of student suffering. This space should be curated and organized by the diverse students in partnership with university services for funding. The lessons learned from those groups can be shared with university staff and students by those groups. The university did not bring the group of (Ch. 4) 'lotuses' together; they did not need to. The role of the university is to be active in developing the awareness and communication spaces that can expand these types of healing groups. In order to illustrate the many observations drawn from my three research questions, the following table juxtaposes elements of suffering in higher education with elements of healing from my autoethnography, as well as associated calls to action for higher education institutions. We look at direct correlation, identity, interbeing, storytelling, research, and mindful awareness.

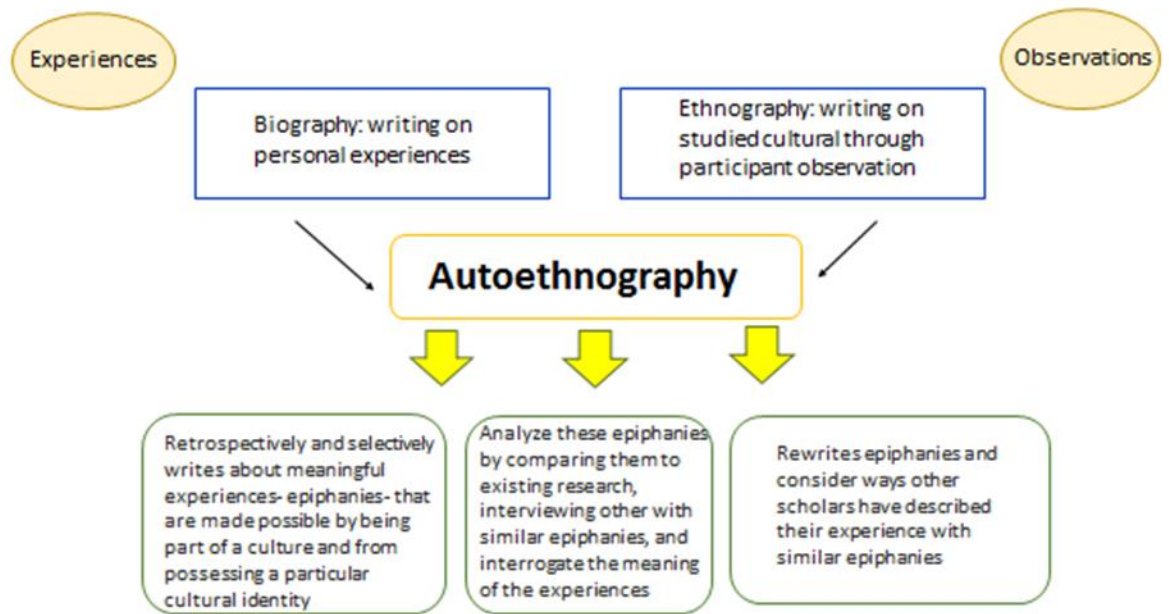
APPENDIX A: BRANCHES OF CRITICAL RACE THEORY



Branches of Critical Race Theory

Source: Yosso (2005) p. 71.

APPENDIX B: AUTOETHNOGRAPHY METHOD



Autoethnography Method

Adams and Ellis (2014)

APPENDIX C: INTERBEING: A CHART OF THE HEALING POSSIBILITIES

Acknowledging Suffering in Higher Education

Causes of Suffering	Signs of Suffering	Healing Sources	Calls for Action from Institutions of Higher Education
<p>There is no official acknowledgement of diverse student suffering. Emotional, psychological, and physical distress, pain, anguish, and anxiety from discrimination and isolation in a culture based fundamentally on white supremacy are woven within the fabric of my college experience. Higher Education practitioners can't look for solutions if they won't state the problem.</p>	<p>Allowing university staff or students to deny others' experience with racism, (do not know that is racism, it could have been lots of things) even in programs meant to alleviate the racism baked into U.S. Institutions. Not addressing suffering contributes to a racist environment. Education practitioners cannot change society, but they can influence how diverse students navigate through college and build social identity.</p>	<p>Recognize, accept, embrace and listen to suffering. Only when practitioners take the time to understand the complexity of individual stories within diverse cultural frameworks will we be capable of standing with those who suffer and helping them transform their suffering into compassion, peace, and joy. We can realize the path leading to the transformation of suffering only when we understand deeply the roots of suffering.</p>	<p>Publicly acknowledge suffering and call on staff and students to recognize, accept, embrace and listen to the suffering of others. Recognize and diagnose suffering explicitly. University is an ideal location to identify ways to heal. Awareness of suffering encourages us to search for its causes and establish new, healthy community building methodologies around diverse identity development in higher education.</p>

<p>Inequities still in place throughout higher education that still (though now unofficially) only serve white, males of socioeconomic status. Current learning practices compound diverse student disenfranchisement through lack of access to services, lack of networking opportunities, unaffordability, and institutional failure to protect diverse students from racist elements of society.</p>	<p>Diverse students entering college have experienced and adjusted to cultural expectations far different than many U.S. Students whose common experiences give them an unspoken advantage with college life and study. Experiences with educators in parental roles, respect for names and cultures, access to resources, etc., separate them from transitional practices that would work for the dominant population.</p>	<p>Help others transform fanaticism and narrowness through compassionate dialogue. If we understand our own cultural heritage and worldview, it will aid in our understanding of others' cultural heritage and worldview. Unique, specific differences in learning style due to diverse upbringings can be recognized with empathy and supported by student services.</p>	<p>The recent rise of white male supremacy in national politics makes it likely that universities will be under significant pressure to defund any research or programs related to diverse groups in state systems. Funding is important, but more important is the commitment of educational practitioners to band together and create safe spaces/communities to foster a world that resists racism. If we understand our own cultural heritage and worldview, it will aid in our understanding of others' cultural heritage and worldview.</p>
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<p>Racism and microaggression: Individuals with agency in the university, unskilled at mindfulness, perpetuate stereotypes without being systematically educated or otherwise stopped and corrected by higher education peers or staff.</p>	<p>Racial stereotypes, make diverse students silent and invisible (as any racial stereotype does). University culture often denies minority experience. The majority of current literature and research continues to minimize diverse students' experiences in systems of categorical vectors, stages, and phases. (e.g. Model minority stereotypes, name changes/"what is your real name?" inquiries.)</p>	<p>Create an environment that consistently trains, educates and values mindfulness, which is non-attachment to views: insight revealed through the practice of compassionate listening, deep looking, and letting go of notions. Encourage others to engage as active participants of whatever space we occupy during whatever time we live.</p>	<p>Research as healing for both professors and students who learn from research (either that they are ignorant or that they are not alone). For example, the MMS and other stereotypes that have caused diverse groups to be invisible should be more publicly discredited: solicit further qualitative and quantitative research experiences of suffering in diverse groups (e.g. Asian Americans are an understudied group).</p>
<p>Student services and academic frameworks often seek to understand people through dualities, which is harmful to diverse students and serves to break down community identity when students are trying to combine a new institutional climate with historical cultures that do not mesh. Acculturation at PWIs in the south can lead to breakdown of identity, changing the self in order to fit in.</p>	<p>Setting up us/them, Black/White paradigm contributes to racism through ignorance, lack of subtlety: the foreign/familiar tribal framing of social dynamics, debates, politics or educated detail lead to more racism. Diverse students in limbo between what they left behind (home and family) and what is in front of them (the university and society) are left to suffer by their guardian institution during a time of crucial identity development.</p>	<p>Speak only with the intention to understand and help transform the situation. Speak truthfully, lovingly and constructively. Speak out about situations of injustice, even when doing so may make difficulties for us or threaten our safety.</p>	<p>Find meaning behind the higher education journey by claiming space, demanding an audience, and pushing the research forward. Diverse students are suffering from the transition, and many in higher education are aiding in their suffering because the university does not acknowledge or recognize this is happening to many students of color.</p>

<p>Diverse students coming to U.S. campuses are experiencing culture shock. There is a monolithic understanding of diverse students' experiences and how they might adjust to this culture. This ignorance of specific cultural norms among diverse groups adds to invisibility and vulnerability. Many diverse college students experience the dynamic of "breaking away" from their family and community in order to gain educational mobility.</p>	<p>Students of color often grew up in non-majority white institutions from grade school until college, and are surprised to have to adapt to a monolithic view of their culture when an institution of education should be interested to address these racist generalities directly. Many students are unprepared to deal with a racist campus environment. E.G.: During first through eighth grade, I mainly stayed within culturally familiar groups.</p>	<p>Unacknowledged suffering is detrimental to well-being. Find ways to be with those who suffer, so we can help them transform their suffering into compassion, peace, and joy. A healthy culture, by acknowledging suffering to the whole community, naturally cultivates compassion, mindfulness, nondualism, and interbeing.</p>	<p>All education institutions should value openness and develop students' understanding and compassion. This approach allows suffering to lead to growth and change. Only when we understand our own suffering, we will be able to understand the suffering of others. Community discussions about each others' suffering interconnects people through individual students/faith, teachings/ actions/ virtues, and community actions (Three Jewels).</p>
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<p>Students experience sexism, xenophobia, historical stereotypes, racism, etc. within society (and higher education). The assumptions made by funding organizations and administrations provide justification for certain diverse communities to be given lesser standards of support and protection while having to learn a new language, customs, and traditions in a country where customs are not understood.</p>	<p>Practitioners in educational institutions tell students how to feel about who they are as an Asian American (what groups they should be affiliated with, what their characteristics are, etc.) E.g.: Asian cultural values such as modesty and self-effacement, which are not widely valued by western culture, often cost us our personal needs, with none of the understanding or traditional reciprocity associated with these practices due to cultural ignorance.</p>	<p>Where there is ignorance, add to the paltry literature on diverse college students in higher education. Increase resources to address inequity. Create a more inclusive environment by educating community to understand various cultural heritage/worldviews.</p>	<p>Administrations are challenged to understand underrepresented and marginalized students in order to provide adequate aid to achieve metrics of success at the university. Factors contributing to diversity such as sexual orientation, gender expression, social class, abilities and disabilities, and spiritual identities, to name a few, are equally important to include in future research to increase understanding and awareness of those who suffer from discrimination.</p>
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<p>Feelings of alienation, disconnection, and isolation: experience of leaving home for the university comparable to the university adopting the diverse student, because when student goes back home, they're looked at as an "outsider" due to misconception of how the university changed them. Ethnic identity is stunted and student saddled with low self-confidence because there is no acknowledgment of culture in the university.</p>	<p>Experience as the only Asian American in a class where issues from Asian countries came up in discussion. Told by students that their experiences and voice do not matter because they are a "twinky", "oreo" etc.: too whitewashed to understand these issues. White woman in class permitted to tell another student that they could be proud, but not too proud, of their ethnicity. Many in diverse students' upbringing pressure and believe that the erasure of all traces of "Asian" identity would help adaptation.</p>	<p>Protecting, nourishing the realization of understanding and compassion: strive to change the situation, without taking sides in a conflict. See ourselves and others as cells in one body. When re-exposed to culture and race, reconnected with birth family, can be a catalyst to realize one has suffered negative effects from acculturation and assimilation, such as loss of identity and stress from never being accepted by the dominant culture.</p>	<p>When educational institutions do not address racial and cultural differences at all, the only acknowledgment of those issues is by racist individuals within the system. Narrative/ storytelling is at the heart of the human experience and is the primary means through which we have, historically, communicated our humanity. Sharing my stories and the importance of interbeing can reduce suffering improve the overall institutional climate: providing hope to reconcile with our sufferings.</p>
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<p>Marginalized individuals and women are often pushed by the dominant culture into silencing each other, as though “there is a historical amnesia that keeps us working to [re]invent the wheel every time.” Also, there is ignorance of intersectionality in higher education: even though progress was made for women in the academy, it did not mean the progress was for all women, including women of color, or women of different national origin from the U.S.</p>	<p>“Eventually, you’ll have to pick a side... it will always be them versus us here,” Having to choose “black or white.” Diversity office was considered the “black office,” by students and faculty. Student mistrust between Asian Americans and other groups. During my undergraduate years at a SU, my choices in activities were catered to the White majority, I dated White partners, went to a predominantly white church, had all White professors/instructors, and my social groups consisted of White friends.</p>	<p>We must take care of our anger and the other emotions that are the results of feeling alienated, disconnected, and isolated: recognize the causes of anger inside ourselves; nourish our capacity of understanding, love, joy and inclusiveness, gradually transforming our anger, violence and fear, and helping others do the same.</p>	<p>Those who serve in higher education institutions also must take care of their anger and emotions are the results of their own college experiences to better serve students unpack this process. Although the multicultural office advised student organizations from Hispanic/Latino, Asian, and other ethnic minorities, their participation was limited by a lack of on staff representation.</p>
<p>Suffering of loss, irreparable friendships, and negative effect of acculturation on diverse students.</p>	<p>Regret: ex-fiancé, child/brother/cousin: came to university for Keb: Could I have noticed symptoms of terminal cancer if I had slowed down and not worked four jobs to support my education? “I could have done more. I didn’t have to be so prideful; I did not ask for help.”</p>	<p>Dwelling in the Present Moment: try not to be carried away by regrets about the past, worries about the future, or craving, anger, or jealousy in the present: practice remembering that we already have more than enough conditions to be happy.</p>	<p>Present noble truths: 1) suffering is a part of life 2) we must find the sources of these sufferings 3) there is an end to suffering if we forgo desire, ill will, and ignorance 4) the end of suffering is contained in the Eightfold Path (right view, intention, speech, action, livelihood, effort, concentration, and mindfulness) deconstruct dualism and present interbeing.</p>

<p>Marginalized students (and faculty, staff, and administrators) are further marginalized by having to choose between ethnicity and race to fit into one's social group. Doctoral journey lost its credibility - nothing was worth putting myself, a member of an often silenced group, through the suffering of finding a voice, and the psychological effects that are attributed to that task.</p>	<p>Noticed that all the black students sat on one side and all the white students sat on the other side. Within the first eight months of employment in my graduate assistantship and interacting with my cohort, I witnessed numerous acts of discrimination, racial microaggressions, leading to disconnection from higher education, its spaces, people, ideas, and, at the same time, disconnection from heritage and culture.</p>	<p>Behave not as a victim but be active in finding ways to reconcile and resolve all conflicts Generosity: working for the happiness of others, sharing our time, energy, and material resources with those who are in need. Trying to prevent others from profiting from human suffering or the suffering of other beings. Remember history of own culture to draw strength (e.g. 4,000 years of Vietnamese history).</p>	<p>Hope - Tiếp Hiện concept of reconciliation. Interconnectedness contributes to the reality of our interwoven collection of sufferings (Hanh, 1998) Reverence for Life: promote peace education, mindful mediation, and reconciliation within families, communities, ethnic and religious groups, nations, and in the world: select a livelihood that contributes to the wellbeing of all species on earth and helps realize our ideal of understanding and compassion.</p>
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